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President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 35

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/445)

The Acting President: I should like to inform members that, in two letters, dated 5 and 6 October 1999 respectively, addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the General Assembly hear statements by the observers of the Holy See and of Switzerland in the debate on agenda item 35.

Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the observer of the Holy See?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the observer of Switzerland?

It was so decided.

Mr. Kahiluoto (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) country member of the European Economic Area (EEA), Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

This agenda item — "Assistance in mine action" — brings a field of tremendous humanitarian suffering before us. Almost one third of the world's nations are, to some extent, contaminated by millions of anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance. Every 20 minutes, someone — in most cases a civilian — is either killed or maimed by an anti-personnel landmine.

Anti-personnel landmines have serious social and economic consequences for the populations of mine-affected countries. Many of the countries which are most severely affected are the least developed. The presence or perceived presence of a few anti-personnel mines has the power to disrupt entire communities.

Significant human and financial resources have been devoted by the international community to assistance in mine action. Many encouraging developments to counter the mine problem have taken place during the last few years. A holistic and multidimensional approach has been

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developed. The responsibilities of United Nations agencies involved in mine action have been determined. The global landmine problem, in terms of the number of mines laid, has been more accurately surveyed. The number of mine incidents has been reduced in many countries and the use of technology and mine-detection dogs to accelerate mine clearance programmes has become a common practice. Much has been done, but more efficient action will be needed.

The primary responsibility for mine action lies with the parties responsible for laying the mines. The extent to which the international community should be called upon to provide assistance in mine action is dependent upon the capacity of the local parties involved to assume these obligations themselves. In this regard, the commitment to renounce the use of anti-personnel landmines is of particular importance.

There have been several important developments in the field of mine action in 1999. The European Union welcomed the entry into force on 1 March 1999 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and was pleased to participate in the First Meeting of States Parties to the Convention in May 1999 in Maputo. We also welcome the entry into force on 3 December 1998 of the amended Protocol II to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects.

In 1997, the European Union adopted a Joint Action regarding anti-personnel landmines, in which the Union reiterates its commitment to the goal of the total elimination of anti-personnel landmines worldwide; to establishing a common moratorium on the production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines; and to undertaking to seek to promote in all appropriate forums, including the Conference on Disarmament, all efforts likely to contribute to the Joint Action objectives. The Union welcomed, for this reason, the opening for signature in Ottawa of the Convention and the efforts made by its signatories to promote universal accession to the Convention.

The European Union supports the central coordinating role of the United Nations Mine Action Service in the field of humanitarian mine action within the United Nations and beyond. We welcome the prompt establishment of the Mine Action Coordination Centre in Kosovo, under the auspices of the Mine Action Service, and encourage similar approaches, where appropriate, to other emergency situations.

The European Union strongly supports the Ottawa Convention inter-sessional work. The five standing committees of experts, which will give their recommendations to the Second Meeting of States Parties, have an important role to play when bringing mine action to the next millennium.

We are committed to participating in international efforts to eliminate these weapons. The Union is the major donor in mine clearance, victim assistance and other mine-action-related activities. In 1993-1997 the Union contributed approximately 135 million euros to mine clearance and victim assistance. In 1998, total funding by the European Commission and member States in mine-action-related activities amounted to approximately 103 million euros. While taking due account of humanitarian concerns, the Union will focus its financial and technical assistance on States parties and on signatories which fully observe in practice the principles and objectives of the Ottawa Convention. The member States also further mine action efforts within the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which has approved a new global humanitarian mine action chapter for its partnership work programme and is developing concrete, practical cooperation in this field. We confirm our commitment to work actively to promote efforts of the international community towards the complete elimination of anti-personnel landmines.

Strong commitment from the international community in the field of mine action is still needed. In order to maintain the momentum and the credibility of mine action, we have to be able to further improve mine action efforts and to put an end to the enormous humanitarian tragedy caused by anti-personnel landmines. We have committed ourselves to solving the problem within years, not decades. With this in mind, the European Union is again this year sponsoring a draft resolution on assistance in mine action, which we hope will receive broad support and will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): The Republic of Croatia has direct experience of the disastrous effects of mines and therefore attaches special importance to mine action assistance. My country was one of the first to actively support the idea of a total ban of anti-personnel landmines; we welcomed this initiative and all subsequent

coordinated actions taken by like-minded States and international and non-governmental organizations.

The Republic of Croatia signed the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-personnel Mines in Ottawa on 4 December 1997. The Government adopted the Convention in March 1998 and Parliament ratified it in April. The ratification instruments were submitted to the United Nations Secretariat on 20 May of the same year, making Croatia, I can proudly mention, the twelfth country to ratify this important document.

The Republic of Croatia continues to welcome all efforts leading towards the global ban on anti-personnel landmines. We also welcome all constructive proposals and projects enabling the realization of a total prohibition of the use and of the destruction of landmines, and we stand ready to cooperate with all other mine-affected countries, primarily in the field of exchanging experiences related to mine detection and underwater demining. In that respect, the Croatian team of experts is looking for the most favourable solutions for achieving the safest and most cost-effective projects which would enable an efficient demining process.

Croatia is one of the most mine-affected countries in the world, with close to 1 million mines buried on its territory. Ten per cent of the total surface of the Republic of Croatia is mine-contaminated. Such a high percentage of mines represents tremendous obstacles to normal functioning of life in these areas, particularly in predominately agricultural regions, hampering the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes.

If one puts aside the economic and infrastructure problems that are very evident in the mine-affected areas, human safety is the factor that certainly prevails. It is precisely the humanitarian nature of the Ottawa movement that has most contributed to the creation of political will and readiness to support this praiseworthy initiative. The effectiveness of anti-personnel mines in military conflicts, often used as an argument by those still unwilling to sign the Ottawa Convention, indeed has proven to be a superfluous element in modern warfare, according to many military analysts and experts. Therefore, as I am sure you all agree, civilian casualties in the aftermath of military conflicts are the only result of the usage of these, I dare say, monstrous devices designed to kill mostly civilians. While speaking of casualties, I must mention that during the past few years, 560 victims of landmines were registered in the Republic of Croatia, 120 of whom were killed.

In order to fight the problem, the demining process in Croatia is proceeding well and is being carried out in accordance with the highest international standards. The United Nations established the Mine Action Centre in Croatia in 1996, which merged with the Croatian Mine Action Centre established in 1998. The mine clearance process is not only frightfully dangerous and time consuming, but it is also a very expensive activity. The cost of mine clearing and other demining-related activities in the Republic of Croatia has, in the past few years, amounted to nearly $150 million. The Government of Croatia has borne 90 per cent of those costs, while 10 per cent has been covered from a donation fund. We are looking forward to the realization of next year's estimated rise in foreign donations to 20 per cent of the total amount required. We are very thankful to all countries, particulary Switzerland, Norway, Germany, Canada, the United States, Japan, Sweden, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Italy; international organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the World Bank and the United Nations Mine Action Service; regional organizations, such as the European Union and the West European Union; and non-governmental organizations such as the Slovenian International Trust Fund, for their valuable contributions.

Experts have estimated that 10 more years of mine clearance are needed to be able to say that most of the work has been done. At this moment we have 800 well-trained and highly skilled experts working in the field. Some of them have been asked to help in the efforts of the international community to clear as many mines as possible in the most sensitive locations before winter arrives in Kosovo, and they have responded very quickly. Currently, the Croatian Mine Assistance Centre, together with the Slovenian International Trust Fund, supported by the United States Government, is working on establishing a regional centre for training mine experts and for testing new technologies.

Croatia looks to the follow-up of the Ottawa process as a catalyst for genuinely advancing mine action throughout the world. Based on our own experience, we firmly believe that more forceful action is required at national, regional and global levels.

As an indicator of our continuous efforts concerning the Ottawa Convention, allow me to inform you of the Regional Mine Action Conference which took place in Zagreb in June this year and which was a follow-up to the first Regional Conference on Landmines, held in Budapest in March 1998. The Conference provided a

forum for a broad exchange of views on recent international and regional mine action developments. The Conference also gave us an opportunity to assess the ongoing programmes in demining and mine-victim assistance and rehabilitation, and it gave political impetus to increasing regional and international cooperation and coordination to meet this challenge. The participation of His Excellency Cornelio Sommaruga, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, was highly appreciated by all participants.

Croatia will work hard with all interested countries to support the Ottawa Convention in its next phase. The resolution now under consideration on assistance in mine action should provide a useful input to our deliberations on the preparatory process. The United Nations role in increasing international mine-related activities and cooperation remains indisputable, and we look forward to its continuing contribution.

Finally, mine action is indeed about people. It is about enabling all of us to live in an environment free from physical, socio-economic and psychological entrapments caused by these callous and indiscriminate killers. Let us make these worthwhile efforts a reality for all.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): This year has been marked by several events adding to the remarkable history of the battle against the scourge of anti-personnel landmines. The Convention on the Prohibition of Mines entered into force on 1 March. With the successful outcome of the First Meeting of the States Parties in May, the Maputo Declaration and the adoption of an inter-sessional work plan, the Convention was established as the primary framework for strategic efforts in resolving the serious humanitarian problems caused by anti-personnel landmines. The true value of the Convention, however, rests on its sustained realization of tangible results in the field. Mine action efforts will not be viable unless we are assured that no new anti-personnel landmines will be emplaced. We urge all those States that have not yet signed and ratified the Convention to do so.

Norway welcomes the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action presented to the General Assembly, giving an overview of the activities of the United Nations system and its interaction with other partners. We appreciate the efforts on the part of the United Nations system in moving from policy formulation to policy implementation. We fully share the approach whereby mine action from an early stage constitutes an integral part of the Organization's broader response to humanitarian crises, reconstruction and development efforts in situations involving the aftermath of conflict.

Mine action cannot be perceived as a mere technical operation. We need to better understand the socio-economic and development implications of the scourge of landmines and the benefits of mine action. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the true essence of progress in the field — that is, to remove landmines from the ground and minimize the risk for people living with the constant threat and terror created by the presence of these weapons.

The United Nations plays a central role in global mine action. We appreciate the role that the United Nations Mine Action Service is playing as the focal point for mine action within the United Nations system. We have contributed to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action in support of the activities of the United Nations Mine Action Service, and we will continue to do so in a flexible manner. The United Nations portfolio on mine action programmes is a tool that hopefully will also be used more actively by Governments as a basis for funding.

The broad-based United Nations assessment missions are important in the planning of future programmes. In this regard, we would stress that it is important for mine-affected countries to give access to the United Nations teams. We also appreciate the contribution by the different United Nations agencies in the development of an integrated approach to dealing effectively with the complexity of the landmine problems.

The revision of international standards for humanitarian mine clearance and the development of international test procedures and guidelines for the use of mine detection dogs and mechanical mine clearance equipment are also greatly appreciated. They will make mine action programmes more effective and reduce accident rates and incidents of incomplete clearance. In order to improve international standards, procedures and guidelines, it is necessary to include the experience and considerations of mine-affected countries, interested States and the operators in the field.

Furthermore, we welcome the project initiated by the United Nations Development Programme on identifying socio-economic indicators for mine action programmes. A clearer picture of the impact of the presence of landmines on people and societies will facilitate improved prioritization.

States, international organizations and non-governmental organizations form a powerful network with the potential to tackle the various aspects of mine action. The inter-sessional work within the framework of the Mine Ban Convention with the standing committees of experts constitute an arena for mine action open for all actors to contribute to the goal of the Convention: a world free of anti-personnel landmines. We look forward to the active participation of the United Nations Mine Action Service and the relevant United Nations agencies in this endeavour.

Predictable and stable funding is necessary to carry out mine action programmes effectively. Norway has made a commitment of $120 million dollars over a five-year period. During 1998 and 1999, more than $45 million dollars have been channelled directly to mine action projects. I would like to highlight a few points which Norway regards as particularly relevant with regard to the implementation of mine action programmes.

First, there is a need to make better use of coordination mechanisms at the country level, preferably headed by national authorities. These groups should include donors, international organizations and national and international non-governmental organizations, and they should work closely with mine action coordination centres in order to ensure effective coordination, prioritization and planning.

Secondly, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre in Kosovo demonstrates one example of effective implementation and coordination. The Kosovo model has managed to encompass all major mine action actors in one homogeneous structure. This approach should be shared with other mine action programmes, though we need to bear in mind that each situation is different and requires its own specific solution.

Thirdly, the early introduction of the Information Management System for Mine Action in Kosovo has been a great asset to the operation. For the first time, all actors involved in mine action, both military and civilian, are able to communicate on the same information platform. We encourage the United Nations to further introduce this management tool in existing programmes.

Finally, assistance to mine victims is a central part of mine action activities. Existing structures within the health and social sectors should be reinforced and services and programmes intended for mine victims should include all persons with disabilities, regardless of the cause. International organizations, donors and affected States should examine further ways of enhancing assistance to mine victims, including socio-economic reintegration. We hope these issues, as well as other thematic questions such as the socio-economic impact of landmines, can be addressed in the report of the Secretary- General next year.

We look forward to continuing our close collaboration with the United Nations system and mine-affected countries, as well as other interested States and non-governmental organizations, in meeting the challenges ahead.

Mr. Ortique (United States of America): Near the start of this century, just 10 per cent of war-time casualties were civilians. More recently, the figure has grown to 90 per cent. This stunning reversal is not due entirely to landmines, but landmines do tell us a great deal about the brutal and indiscriminate nature of conflict in our time. Notwithstanding removal efforts, an estimated 70 million landmines still scar the surface of our world.

These weapons are a terrible humanitarian problem, but they also slow political development and retard economic progress. They keep refugees from going home and the displaced from their land long after the guns of war fall silent. They are cheap to buy, easy to use, hard to detect and difficult to remove. They do the most harm to societies that can least afford to clear mines, to caution their civilians, to care for victims or to cope with the loss of their agricultural land. Above all, they endanger those who endanger no one by creating fear in the innocent and the young, far too frequently crippling them or too often taking their very lives.

Realistically, President Clinton and Vice-President Gore have made it a goal of the United States to help end the threat posed by landmines to civilians of every part of every region of every continent around the world before the turn of the next decade. Since 1993 the United States has provided more than $350 million to this effort, four times that of any other country. Today we are helping some 30 countries to map and clear their most dangerous minefields, to train local deminers and to teach children and adults how to identify and avoid mines. We are working with groups such as the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, the Landmine Survivors Network and the Patrick Leahy War Victims Fund to assist and to counsel landmine survivors in more than a dozen countries.

We are using the best scientific talents presently available to improve mine detection and clearance techniques. But, regrettably, as the twenty-first century is about to dawn, the technology most commonly used to find mines around the world is still a stick attached to a human arm. Mankind, which relentlessly pursues pathways to the other planets and beyond, can and must do better than this.

That is why my country is creating testing centres and funding research at 14 universities around the country. And that is why the National Aeronautics and Space Administration has a project to apply the same techniques used in trying to detect life on Mars to the task of finding landmines, thereby protecting life on Earth.

Eliminating the landmine threat to civilians by the end of the coming decade is a daunting challenge, but I am convinced that it is attainable. There have been real success stories along the way to encourage us. In Cambodia, for example, the landmine accident rate has been reduced by 90 per cent — the difference between health and injury or death for more than 5,000 Cambodians this year alone. In Afghanistan hundreds of thousands of acres previously lost to mines are now supporting productive crops. In Mozambique refugees have returned home on 4,000 miles of roads that have been cleared of their mines. Great strides have also been made in Central Europe and Central America. Governments alone did not make this progress. But the only way to reach our larger goal is for countries, non-governmental groups and people all over the world to work together.

In the United States the private sector and voluntary organizations have responded to the landmine crisis with generosity, creativity and heart. The United Nations Association of the United States of America is sponsoring the Adopt-A-Minefield Campaign. Already 40 groups around the country have raised more than $2 million to clear a path to a safer world.

I would respectfully suggest that it is frequently appropriate to seek simple pursuits and engage less sophisticated educational tools that are significantly successful in saving lives. For example, DC Comics and the United Nations Children's Fund are producing comic books for Bosnia, Central America and Kosovo in which Superman and Wonderwoman teach kids and their parents how to spot and stay away from landmines. The Marshall Legacy Institute has launched a canine corps, a programme to use dogs to sniff out mines around the world. The Humane Society is also involved, because they recognize that mines kill hundreds of thousands of animals every year.

These are simplistic efforts, but effective. Simplistic, but successful. Thus the United States is the world's leader in civilian humanitarian demining, but, as I have emphasized, this is not and cannot be a solo proposition. We can succeed only by continuing to collaborate with mine-affected countries, with the United Nations, with private groups and with foreign donors.

Every day, mine by mine, acre by acre, people across our globe are reclaiming their lands and moving closer, with every safe and silent step, to a life filled with hope and free from fear. By working to eliminate this scourge in the lives of the innocent, we secure our future, but we also secure their future in the breast of a tranquil peace for all of the world.

With persistence, determination and generosity, all of us must continue to progress, because, as we look to the new century, there could be no more appropriate a goal than enabling every child everywhere to walk our earth in the rapture of peace, justice and safety. With this I challenge my fellow representatives, and I thank you, Mr. President, for giving me the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Jayanama (Thailand): On behalf of the Thai delegation, I would like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on "Assistance in mine action" dated 6 October 1999. The report's review of coordinated mine action, the activities of agencies within the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations, and the various country programmes provides a comprehensive picture of, and useful information on, the current state of play on this important issue. More significantly, it highlights once again the continuing dangerous threat posed by landmines and unexploded ordnance to all people, regardless of gender, race or age.

Landmines not only kill and maim indiscriminately, claiming the lives of innocent civilians, including women and children, but they also hamper socio-economic development, divert scarce resources from more productive activities and instil constant fear and insecurity among the local population. Landmines are cheap to produce and easily deployed, but the costs of their removal are a hundred times higher, not to mention the incalculable human toll, which could not be valued in terms of dollars and cents. Landmines undoubtedly pose a pre-eminent threat to human security.

Although Thailand neither produces nor exports landmines, it knows only too well their devastating consequences on people's lives and welfare through firsthand experience of the spillover effects of armed conflicts in neighbouring countries over the past 30 years. About 796 square kilometres of our border areas are infested with anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance. Countless Thai children, as well as those of displaced persons, have lost their lives or become amputees. Even more have been orphaned.

For these reasons, Thailand strongly supports the goal of "zero victims" and all international efforts to resolve the landmine threat once and for all. These should include not only mine clearance but also mine-awareness development, mine-victim assistance and the rehabilitation of mined areas.

The process engendered by the signing and coming into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, known as the Ottawa Convention, is one that Thailand fully embraces. In our view, this process should be further reinforced through concrete steps taken both on the ground and in international forums. In this context, we welcome the renewed commitment to the total eradication of landmines contained in the Maputo Declaration of the inaugural Meeting of the States Parties to the 1999 Ottawa Convention, as well as the inter-sessional work programme. We hope that the informal standing committees of experts established in Maputo will add impetus to international cooperation and to the momentum of assistance in this area, so that closer coordination of efforts with all concerned parties at the international, regional and subregional levels would be effected.

The need for effective coordination cannot be overemphasized. In this connection, we welcome the establishment of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and commend its efforts in coordinating mine action activities among different United Nations agencies and other organizations.

For its part, Thailand has undertaken numerous efforts towards the elimination of the threat of landmines. We ratified the Ottawa Convention on 27 November last year. On 1 May 1999, the day the Ottawa Convention entered into force for Thailand, we destroyed 10,000 anti-personnel landmines in stock, thus becoming the first developing country to destroy mines as stipulated in the Convention.

To rationalize mine action efforts at the national level, the Thailand Mine Action Centre (TMAC) was established in December last year as the focal point for mine action in the country. The Centre is responsible for drafting the national strategic plan on mine action, which includes information dissemination on mine action activities, demining, destroying mines in stockpile, conducting training and providing assistance to mine victims. The Centre also works closely with both international and Thai non-governmental organizations, including the Thailand Campaign to Ban Landmines, which is affiliated with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the recipient of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.

Some of the specific activities being planned by the Centre include the following: conducting a level 1 survey in order to help establish a national database on the mine situation and its impact, pending approval by the United Nations Mine Action Service; fencing and marking mined areas in accordance with article 7 of the Ottawa Convention, which deals with transparency measures; and developing a "training of trainers" programme for demining.

The successful completion of these projects, however, requires assistance from the international community. We thus call on the United Nations Mine Action Service to provide the necessary funds for the level 1 study project. We believe international assistance to mine-affected countries, which are mostly developing countries, whether for mine clearance or humanitarian assistance both to victims and survivors of landmines, is a vital element of cooperation in mine action. The voluntary trust fund for assistance in mine action is thus a necessity.

Thailand also supports cooperation in mine action at the regional level. Such cooperation has taken place along the Thai-Cambodian border, the area of the largest concentration of landmines in Thailand. The Thai Government's past contributions to mine clearance efforts in Cambodia, made in collaboration with the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia in 1992 and 1993, are well known. More recently, in February this year, Thailand and Cambodia agreed to take all the necessary steps to make their common borders free from all landmines within three years and to establish joint projects on mine clearance and other related activities. This initiative is an exemplary stepping stone for enhanced cooperation among countries in the region to eliminate the common threat of landmines. We hope that

such humanitarian cooperation with other neighbours will also be possible in the near future.

We in the international community are committed to achieving peace, security and prosperity for all people in the next millennium, and the total elimination of landmines is certainly one of our foremost tasks. Although the harm and suffering brought about by this indiscriminate weapon of terror cannot be undone overnight, we hope that, in our enlightenment, we can make up for our past errors. Through strong commitment and joint action, we can help remove the threat that landmines pose, as well as alleviate the suffering they have caused to more than a few generations of mankind.

Ms. Molaroni (San Marino): The Republic of San Marino was among the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, because it realized its importance and its great implications for human lives. We are extremely satisfied to see that it has finally entered into force, and we hope that more and more countries will not only become parties to it but will start to implement its articles as soon as possible.

At the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, held in Maputo, the States parties wisely decided on an inter-sessional programme of work and established five informal standing committees of experts on mine clearance; victim assistance, socio-economic reintegration and mine awareness; technologies for mine action; stockpile destruction; and general status and operation of the Convention.

To date, 136 countries have signed the Ottawa Convention and 88 have ratified it. The Convention requires that States parties destroy stockpiled anti-personnel mines within four years of ratification and eliminate the mines already in the ground within 10 years. Unfortunately, the process of demining takes much longer in many cases, due to the lack of adequate funding, infrastructures, programmes, coordination and expertise. Worse still, it is due in many instances to the excessive bureaucracy and the need to protect economic interests.

Eighty-seven countries and eight other areas in the world are affected by both landmines and unexploded ordnance; 27 of the countries affected are States parties to the Convention, 23 are signatories and 37 have not yet joined it. In Africa, of 48 countries, 26 are affected by landmines, and in America, 9 out of 35 countries have them. In Asia, 16 out of 39 countries have landmines; in Europe and Central Asia, 23 countries have them; and in the Middle East and North Africa, 13 out of 18 countries are affected by this plague.

All of this data may give the impression that the world has precise information about the nature of this problem, but that is not the case. The lack of proper and accurate information about the dissemination of landmines is substantial. Many projects are being carried out at this very moment to ascertain the dimensions of landmine infestation in particular countries, but even so the data is fragmented and incomplete. In Africa, the worst affected area of the globe, only one third of the affected countries have undergone some kind of survey on the landmine situation. The Republic of San Marino is deeply convinced that mine awareness is a cornerstone of mine action and that information and education are the main tools to reduce the landmine threat.

Humanitarian mine clearance is a relatively new discipline. It involves the technical issues of detecting and destroying various mines and ammunition, and the managerial, developmental, social and financial aspects of implementing large programmes in a broad variety of scenarios. Up until now, most humanitarian programmes have been funded in a fragmented manner, on a short-term basis and with short planning horizons. Even so, in the majority of countries, the capacities and the programmes exist to implement mine clearance, although they are not always exploited in the best way. Too many countries still ignore the situation and non-governmental organizations are left alone to work towards that goal. In other countries, programmes are operated by military units or commercial entrepreneurs, and there is no actual assurance of a long-lasting results. In fact, if Governments do not commit themselves to respecting international standards, we can have very low expectations about the total elimination of this scourge.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to commend the work of the United Nations Mine Action Service, among all other international and national institutions, and its staff, who have succeeded in achieving great results, notwithstanding the scarce funding. The Mine Action Service adopted an inter-agency approach, identifying local conditions and concerns and making it possible to tailor mine action assistance to fit individual countries' needs. For this reason, San Marino has decided to make a voluntary contribution to its projects. This contribution underlines

the active commitment of my country and is given in recognition of all the efforts of the Mine Action Service.

Mine awareness efforts represent an important part of the programmes to reduce human risk. Educational mechanisms focusing on changing risk behaviours and creating awareness of safety measures are a necessity if we want to reduce the number of landmine victims during the process of demining, which in many cases can last years.

For a considerable time, San Marino has been making its contribution, on an understandably small scale, to projects to improve social awareness of arms and landmines in various affected areas of the globe. For next year, my Government has already allocated some voluntary funds to finance projects in these areas, and we hope that more and more countries will soon join us. However, landmines and unexploded ordnance awareness programmes exist in only 40 of the 87 affected countries. That is definitely not enough.

A further aspect of the question is the survey process, which makes it possible to identify and to map problem areas and allocate resources according to the density of landmines and the higher risk factors. San Marino believes that priority should be given to densely populated areas of the globe, that people should come first and that we should direct our action to alleviating the suffering of those populations that risk their lives every day.

For all of those reasons, we will always support this item in the General Assembly and in the First Committee until landmines become a distant memory. That will be one of the greatest victories of the United Nations.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, my delegation would like to convey its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and informative report on assistance in mine action, contained in document A/54/445. The report presents a useful overview of mine action currently undertaken by United Nations programmes and other related agencies.

The question of mines and other unexploded ordnance resulting from protracted wars, regional conflicts and internal struggles continues to be a matter of special concern for the international community. Though national and local approaches to the problem of mine clearance have existed for decades, millions of landmines and other unexploded ordnance are still buried in the soil or scattered on the surface in over 60 countries around the world, and thousands of innocent people are being killed or injured every day. While causing great suffering and death to innocent people, these hidden killers also create tremendous obstacles to the development of the economic and social infrastructure of the affected nations. Every effort should therefore be made to intensify international cooperation in mine actions. My delegation firmly believes that only through such a collective effort can human beings live safe from these killers.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is today seriously affected by unexploded ordnance as a result of the heaviest aerial bombardment during the Indo-China war, especially between 1964 and 1973. During this period, over 500,000 bombing missions were launched, dropping more than two million tons of bombs on this small country of 4.5 million inhabitants. Most of the bombing consisted of anti-personnel cluster bombs filled with 670 bomblets or "bombies", as they are known in Laos, that were intended to explode on or shortly after impact. Whereas the manufacturers of this ordnance estimated a failure rate of as low as 10 per cent, it is now generally agreed that the actual failure rate may have been as high as 30 per cent. Extensive ground battles in several provinces also left staggering amounts of unexploded ordnance, including mortar and artillery shells, mines, sub-munitions and other devices of various origins, which gives the Lao People's Democratic Republic the distinction of being one of the most heavily ordnance-contaminated nations in the world.

Twenty-five years after the end of the war, unexploded ordnance contamination still affects up to 50 per cent of the landmass of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Bomblets can be found everywhere, in villages and towns, along roads, on hillsides, in gardens and rice fields. They do not choose, but rather strike all their victims equally, including children, women and subsistence farmers.

The Lao Government has drawn up a comprehensive programme to address this problem in all its humanitarian, social and environmental dimensions. Within a framework of integrating our efforts, the Lao National Unexploded Ordnance Programme, known as UXO Lao, has been set up with the objectives of reducing the number of civilian casualties from unexploded ordnance and increasing the amount of land available for food production and other development activities.

UXO Lao activities are divided into four important components, including Community Awareness, Training

and Capacity Building, Survey, and Clearance. The programme is now fully operational in 9 of 15 unexploded ordnance-contaminated provinces and has a national staff of 880 supported by 32 international advisors.

According to the 1998 annual report, 269 students graduated from the National Training Centre and have joined those now serving in the field; and 67,875 items of ordnance were destroyed across the country, exceeding the target of 45,000 items. Equally important, over 292 hectares of agriculture land and land for development were cleared of unexploded ordnance. This far exceeded the yearly target, which had been set at 200 hectares. With regard to community awareness activities, some 556 villages were visited and over 161,000 people were briefed on the dangers of unexploded ordnance; roving teams also visited 1,392 villages in response to emergency requests.

Despite the progress made, unfortunately, there were still 89 accidents related to unexploded ordnance reported during 1998; in those, 59 people were seriously injured and 30 people were killed. In the first months of 1999, the accident rate and number of injuries were higher than during the same period of 1998. This increase reflects, among other things, improved reporting mechanisms and growing pressure for access to new land.

The UXO Lao Trust Fund, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), continues to be the main channel for contributions to the work of UXO Lao. Over the past three years, funding has been provided by UNDP, UNICEF, the European Union and the Governments of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Japan, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the United States and the United Kingdom. The programme is also supported by some international implementing partners such as Handicap International, the Mine Advisory Group and Norwegian People's Aid, among others. In this regard, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its sincere appreciation to all donors for the generous assistance and support which have rendered the UXO Lao Trust Fund activities possible.

The approximate overall mobilization target for the year 2000 is over 13 million dollars, to be received either as cash or in-kind contributions. The fund available nevertheless is little more than $4 million. We are therefore quite concerned about this reduction in contributions. Due to shortfalls in donor support, the status of the programme remains uncertain and the current level of operations will not be sustainable in the future. Therefore, together with UNDP and UNICEF, we will continue to try hard to secure the necessary funding for programme operations for the year 2000 and beyond. In this connection, it is our fervent hope that the international community will continue to lend its support and assistance to our arduous efforts to achieve the objectives set out in the programme.

As we stand at the threshold of the new century, let us rededicate ourselves to demining activities so as to give peoples the opportunity to live in an environment free from the physical, socio-economic and psychological traps these killers create and to ensure that those now living with the threat of landmines will have the chance to enjoy a peaceful and productive existence. We believe that only through concerted global efforts and cooperation, with the United Nations as a focal point for mine action, will we be able to accomplish the huge tasks that lie ahead.

Mr. Livermore (Canada): The report of the Secretary-General on mine action highlights both the challenges that lie before the international community and the strategies required to address this issue in a comprehensive fashion. Canada wishes to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for providing such a comprehensive and timely report.

I was forcefully struck by the magnitude and seriousness of the landmine problem when I visited the most mine-affected State in the Americas — Nicaragua — earlier this month. I talked to people who live in fear of the very ground on which they walk. I met with survivors of landmine incidents. I saw tracts of land rendered unusable because of the suspected presence of mines. The scenes I witnessed in Nicaragua are repeated all too often in post-conflict situations throughout the world. In Croatia, Cambodia, Mozambique, Yemen and dozens of other States, citizens and societies must contend with the deadly legacy of landmines in their attempts to rebuild lives and communities long after conflicts have ended.

Yet, in addition to witnessing the devastating impact of mines, while in Nicaragua I also saw the hope that flows from international efforts to address the impact of landmines. Through the cooperation of civil society, non-governmental organizations, the military and the Organization of American States (OAS), hundreds of thousands of square metres of land have been cleared in

Nicaragua and a work programme has been established to complete the task.

(spoke in French)

Through the OAS, the United Nations, other international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and other institutional arrangements, Canada has committed more than $1 million to support mine-action activities in Nicaragua.

(spoke in English)

Our commitment to mine clearance is multifaceted. In South America, Canada is supporting mine clearance along the Peru-Ecuador border. In the Middle East, Canada has provided equipment and training to Jordan's demining programme. In Europe, Canada has made major commitments to mine clearance in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo. In Africa, Canada has made a multimillion-dollar investment in Mozambique's mine-action programme. And in Asia, Canada is continuing its long-standing commitment to assist Cambodia with its devastating mine problem.

Since the signing of the Ottawa Convention in December 1997, Canada has disbursed more than Can$10 million in support of mine-clearance operations. The role of the United Nations — of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and the United Nations Development Programme — in mobilizing donor support and organizing programmes in mine-affected countries has been truly impressive.

Clearing mined land is, of course, only one aspect of mine action. Governments, along with international and non-governmental organizations, must take action to prevent new mine casualties and to provide assistance to survivors of mine incidents. Canada applauds the leadership of the United Nations Children's Fund in providing mine-awareness education to populations at risk, as well as in developing international guidelines for raising public awareness about landmines and unexploded ordnance. Canada has supported mine-awareness programmes in Afghanistan, Angola, Iraq, Laos and Yemen.

We also recognize that the international community as a whole has an obligation to meet the needs of survivors of landmine incidents. Canada's commitment to victim assistance is a global one, including support to programmes in Cambodia, Afghanistan and Uganda, as well as a multimillion-dollar commitment to the Pan American Health Organization's victim-assistance programme in Central America.

The essence of successfully addressing the landmine problem is developing comprehensive, workable strategies to meet each situation. We agree with the Secretary-General that at the heart of mine action are assessment missions, comprehensive national surveys and other mine-related information activities, effective coordination and information management, and research into and development of mine-related technologies. As a lead proponent of national level 1 surveys, we have made multimillion-dollar commitments to surveys in Yemen and Mozambique.

(spoke in French)

In addition, Canada is committed to increasing the quantity and quality of other information that will strengthen mine-action efforts. We are supporting the pilot testing of victim-assistance information tools in Afghanistan and a project in eastern Africa.

(spoke in English)

With respect to coordination, Canada emphasizes the important coordination and priority-setting role of the United Nations Mine Action Service. Over the past two years Canada has helped to fund some of the core activities of UNMAS. This year we provided it with a database that will enable mine-action donors to communicate about their mine-action efforts.

Advocacy remains an exceptionally important component of mine action. Through measures like advocacy in support of the comprehensive ban on anti-personnel mines, we can help to ensure that the landmine problem does not worsen. We applaud the work of literally hundreds of non-governmental organizations, many under the auspices of the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines, which are the very heart and soul of international advocacy and which have continued to work to make the landmine ban treaty as universal as possible.

(spoke in French)

One of the most important ways to prevent the exacerbation of the landmine problem is to destroy mine stocks. Canada commends those States that have partially or completely destroyed their mine stocks, and we call on all signatories to the Ottawa Convention to finalize a

timetable for the destruction of their stocks. Canada is working in partnership with Ukraine to assist in the destruction of its anti-personnel mines, and we urge other States which have the means to do so to provide similar assistance wherever it may be needed.

(spoke in English)

If we are to eradicate the devastating impact of landmines, we must continue to support the full spectrum of activities which form part of mine action. For the 89 States parties to the Ottawa Convention, providing assistance to international mine-related activities is an obligation. Canada also values the contributions of other States which have yet to ratify the Convention. While we welcome the statements of several States which have forsworn the production, stockpiling, use or transfer of anti-personnel mines, we should be clear that our ultimate goal is the universal acceptance of the total ban on anti-personnel mines through adherence to the landmine ban Convention. Until we attain this goal, the human security of individuals throughout the world in this area cannot be guaranteed. We should therefore make it our collective goal to increase the numbers of ratifications, attaining at least 100 prior to 1 March, 2000, the first anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention.

Hand in hand with the issue of ratification is the full and effective implementation of the Convention. We congratulate the Government of Mozambique on hosting the highly successful First Meeting of States Parties in Maputo in May of this year. We look forward with anticipation to the second meeting next year in Geneva. The inter-sessional work programme established under the Convention has been launched successfully and will address such crucial issues as technology and stockpile destruction at forthcoming sessions in Geneva. To make this inter-sessional work programme effective, we urge all States parties to provide complete and timely information, as required under article 7, and we invite all States which have yet to ratify the Convention to provide, on a voluntary basis, the information described in article 7.

When I travel within or outside of Canada, I am often asked: What difference has the Ottawa Convention made? The answer is simple: The Convention has provided the international community with a framework for action with respect to the mine problem, planting the seeds of hope that this is an issue on the way to solution. It has also established an international standard. No longer will countries be able to use landmines with impunity. Mined land is being cleared and returned to the community. In Croatia, 50 per cent of all mined roads, infrastructure and inhabited areas have been cleared. Casualty rates are dropping. In Afghanistan and Cambodia, casualty rates fell by almost half between 1993 and 1998.

Landmine survivors are now receiving more services and greater recognition. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 38 clinics have been set up, providing a full range of services to landmine victims. Stockpiled mines are also being destroyed at an impressive rate. Since the beginning of the Ottawa process, over 14 million mines have been destroyed.

This is not yet a battle won, but over the past two years and more we have turned the corner in addressing a severe humanitarian crisis. The challenges ahead are to maintain the momentum and to continue to work constructively together. The leadership of the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as the support of all international organizations, are crucial to this process. We offer the Secretary-General Canada's continued cooperation and our utmost support to achieve a world that is truly mine-free.

Mr. Amer (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today, the General Assembly is considering for the seventh consecutive time the important item on assistance in mine action. I should like to express our full appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report, which contains most valuable information on the clearance of mines, which affect almost half the States Members of the United Nations. The report refers to the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, held in May. This very important Meeting marked a new stage in international demining efforts.

Mines threaten human life everywhere and have serious social and economic consequences. For this and other reasons, we have followed with great interest the demining efforts of States and attended the First Meeting in our capacity as an observer. We maintain our observer status because we have some reservations about the Convention. We believe that the Convention is selective and does not take into account the need to identify the legal responsibility of colonial States that have laid mines on the territories of other States. This issue should be considered in the context of the Convention if the real goal is the total abolition of mines and the dangers they pose to all humanity.

For over 50 years now, my country has been the victim of mines laid by other countries. During the Second World War, the warring armies laid mines over vast swaths of Libyan territory. Studies have shown that there are tens of millions of such mines in Libya. One study carried out by a group of United Nations experts determined that, in the course of various campaigns in North Africa, the Allies and the Axis forces laid between 5 and 19 million explosives and mines. The victorious as well as the defeated armies left the countries of the region, abandoning the mines and the explosives that they had planted and stockpiled.

These mines are now covered by sand and rubble. They occasionally explode, claiming men, women, children and the elderly as victims, who may be mutilated, handicapped, blinded or killed. Many have fallen to date. The study cited in the report before us describes the large number of victims, echoing a previous study cited in document A/38/383, which noted that, in the 30 years following the Second World War, 4,000 Libyans were killed by mines and many thousands more wounded, including women and children.

Mines have claimed other victims as well: thousands of sheep and cattle. They have shut down roads and other means of transportation and hindered our efforts to combat desertification and undertake agrarian reform. The United Nations report issued five years ago shows that about 27 per cent of Libya's cultivable land is strewn with mines. This has been an obstacle to our country's development, especially in the coastal areas. The existence of mines has also hindered the exploitation of natural resources such as oil, gypsum and iron ore. To cope with this problem, we have devised several demining awareness and training programmes.

The facts show that mine clearance with the means presently available is a very difficult undertaking because lands strewn with mines are vast and Libya does not have maps or enough information about the location of these mines. In order to deal with these problems, Libya, like other States, welcomes any assistance provided by the United Nations in the area of mine clearance. Whatever the assistance or however much it is, it will never be enough to rid us of the mines and explosives laid in our territory.

I should like to draw attention to the fact that the countries that have laid mines in our territory are the parties primarily responsible for their clearance and for compensating for all damages and losses resulting from such mines. This is a principle that has been adopted by many regional and international organizations, such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Organization of African Unity and the General Assembly. The latter adopted a resolution requesting States that have laid mines to make available to the victim States the geographical location and maps of such mines. These provisions also allow for compensation to be paid to the victim States.

In other resolutions, there are similar provisions to the effect that the responsibility for those mines and for the effects of war is incumbent upon States that have laid the mines and caused the damage. They should therefore offer technical assistance and necessary information, compensate States and help them in every way in their demining efforts.

We have expressed earlier our satisfaction with the agreement that we reached with Italy in July 1998 for removing the mines laid in our territory during the Second World War. We are pleased with the ensuing cooperation and the practical measures taken to train people in mine clearance and to establish a medical centre for the treatment and rehabilitation of victims of these mines.

This agreement with Italy is a very positive one. It can serve as an example for the other two States that have placed mines on our territory — the United Kingdom and Germany. These countries should cooperate with us in putting an end to this problem in all its aspects by providing us with locator geographical maps for those mines, as well as providing assistance and compensation to our people who have suffered from these attacks for more than 50 years.

I wish to thank once again the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and specialized agencies for their efforts to cooperate with us on mine clearance. However, such efforts have so far been focused on mines laid under specific circumstances. The Secretary-General told us that the activities conducted by the United Nations should deal with other aspects as well. The report does not refer to mines laid a long time ago, between the two World Wars, and we hope that this will cover all mines, the most recent as well the older ones. It is a devastating force, and the older mines, like the newer ones, limit our agrarian reforms and economic development.

In addition to causing suffering, human losses and damage to the environment, all mines are obstacles to development. This is a matter of interest to the entire

international community, which should spare no effort to remove all mines from the earth and eliminate this danger which threatens this generation and future ones.

Mr. de Beauvais (France) (*spoke in French*): The French delegation fully associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. The draft resolution on assistance in mine action, introduced by the representative of Finland in the Presidency of the European Union, attests to the dedication of the 15 Union members to the Ottawa Convention, to their will to actively contribute to its universalization and to their interest in the most appropriate means to achieve this goal.

The draft resolution highlights in particular significant developments regarding the issue of technologies made available to the international mine clearance community and notes the shortcomings in available equipment for detection and for removing mines which is reliable and financially accessible. The draft resolution therefore calls once again for the strengthening of international cooperation in order to have a rapid improvement of needed technologies.

This aspect of the struggle to eradicate the scourge of anti-personnel mines deserves our attention for two major reasons: technological progress, which is the indispensable key to decisive progress in the field regarding weapons disseminated in huge numbers over vast areas, in 60 countries; and promising scientific progress which we see today here and there. However, a realistic inventory of what can be done today highlights the very traditional nature of the equipment most often used, the too low level of security for those engaged in mine clearance and the very slow pace of demining operations.

Therefore, the European Union once again launches a double appeal to all those who have the means — Member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, public and private foundations — to provide victim countries appropriate technological assistance and to promote a coordinated effort of research and development likely to come up with safer, more effective and less costly methods of technology. It is also relevant to emphasize, as the draft resolution does, how much the efforts of this kind will be enhanced if they are accompanied by normative activities that are genuinely universal in terms of their technical scope as well as their geographical range.

Among the standing committees of experts formed by the States parties to the Ottawa Convention last May in Maputo, one committee — to which the chairmanship was jointly entrusted, until the next Meeting of the States Parties, to Cambodia and France — is responsible for mine clearance technology. Its mandate covers various aspects, to which brief reference was just made, and that is the burden and the importance of its task.

Called upon to meet in Geneva, at the International Humanitarian Demining Centre next December and then in May next year, it will engage first in an exhaustive and critical inventory of the needs of users. Later it will review existing techniques and technologies and those being planned in order to be able to provide, in September 2000 to the States parties, realistic and balanced conclusions as to what can and should be done by the international community to achieve genuine progress in this critical area for humanitarian mine clearance.

The mandate of the expert group on the technologies in question therefore requires a mobilization of numerous players next December: the officials of mine action centres, active players in non-governmental organizations involved in such activities, regional organizations and international fund-raisers, researchers and analysts, public and private research and development institutions, and States directly or indirectly responsible for research efforts in the directions earlier referred to. Participation at the highest level of responsibility and expertise of these various elements of the international mine clearance community will be indispensable for the success of that work.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express our thanks to the Secretary-General for his progress report on assistance in mine action and the mobilization of resources for the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action to help in mine clearance. The Fund has contributed clearly and positively to addressing this question.

The attention given to this subject by the General Assembly since 1993 and the increased attention to it on the part of the international community as a whole express awareness of the gravity of the mine problem, which must be dealt with comprehensively, while taking into account all the dimensions and aspects of the problem. In this regard, Egypt supports the important role played by the United Nations in the field of assistance in mine action, be it through the Voluntary Trust Fund or through the United Nations Mine Action Service. It is our hope that they both will contribute

effectively and positively to solving the severe repercussions of the question of mines in all its aspects.

In paragraph 150, the Secretary-General's report states:

> "Though the level of interest in the global landmine crisis remains high, the focus of concern for humanitarian and development assistance by donor Governments and donor organizations is constantly being pulled in many directions. Each new humanitarian crisis inevitably draws the world's attention and resources away from other, equally worthwhile causes."

As a mine-affected country, Egypt fully concurs with what the Secretary-General has stated in that paragraph. Once again, we reaffirm the need to attach the same level of importance to all mine problems, whether they are old or recent. They must all be dealt with in a fair and balanced manner.

On another level, we have detected in the Secretary-General's report a clear emphasis on the humanitarian dimension of the mine problem alone, without giving the other interrelated dimensions of the problem as a whole the same emphasis. While we appreciate the importance of the humanitarian dimension of the mine problem, we also deem it necessary that all the other aspects of the problem — whether related to development, economics, demographics or security — must be dealt with, in order to arrive at a comprehensive solution to the mine problem and not an inconclusive, palliative one.

In this regard, I cannot fail to recall the conclusion of the Secretary-General's 1997 report, which stated that it was high time to define the scope and magnitude of the mine problem once and for all and that a more accurate global assessment was necessary. According to that report, such assessment would take into account a number of elements, including political, humanitarian, developmental, economic and security-related ones.

Allow me now to deal with the problem of landmines in my country, Egypt. The problem is the presence of nearly 23 million landmines laid in an area of more than 288,000 hectares of Egyptian territory. This constitutes a huge obstacle to the development of these regions. Most of these mines were laid by the warring parties during the Battle of El-Alamein in October and November 1942.

The Egyptian authorities are currently implementing, within their financial capabilities, an ambitious plan to clear Egyptian territory of the landmines laid by the warring parties during the Second World War. Action under this plan has been carried out since July 1991.

In this regard, I would like to reiterate the following points: first, the implementation of this plan places huge technical and financial burdens that the Egyptian Government should not bear alone. Secondly, there is an urgent and immediate need for the countries that laid mines in Egyptian territory to provide accurate maps and information on their location, in addition to assistance in their clearance. Thirdly, the cost of clearing these mines has risen sharply, since a large number of them are currently buried under thick layers of sand. In view of the sand dune shifts in that area over the years, some of those mines are a few metres below the surface.

Fourthly, the presence of such a huge number of mines over a very large area clearly thwarts the efforts of the Egyptian Government to use and exploit natural resources in that land. It is also an obstacle to the development efforts carried out by the Egyptian Government in both the Western desert and Sinai. Fifthly, these mines, most of which are a mixture of anti-personnel and anti-tank landmines, have caused and continue to cause humanitarian losses and obstacles that the human conscience cannot afford to overlook.

Absent from the Secretary-General's report is a reference to the responsibility of those States that laid mines in the territory of other States in the past. Also absent from the report is the call to those States to provide assistance to clear the mines that they laid — those mines, which as I said before, have caused innumerable human tragedies and developmental obstacles.

The delegation of Egypt regrets once again that the report did not contain the question of the responsibility of the countries that have laid the mines as one of the aspects of the problem as a whole. In this regard, I would like to reaffirm that mine clearance is not the responsibility of the affected countries alone; it is also the responsibility of the States that laid the mines in the territories of others. In addition, mine clearance is the responsibility of the international community as a whole. In this context, we welcome the view expressed in the statement made by Finland on behalf of the European Union regarding the responsibility of the parties that have laid mines in the territories of other States.

The concept of demining has been further developed since the signing of the Ottawa Convention. This question is being treated from a new perspective that takes into account a number of considerations, in addition to those pertaining to demining per se, including rehabilitation and advocacy. This is reflected in the draft resolution under this agenda item, the title of which was changed from "Assistance in mine clearance", its title at the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, to "Assistance in mine action". Although we do not object to this new tendency, we continue to believe that attention must be focused primarily on demining operations intended to prevent further suffering and human losses.

In this connection, I must refer to the fact that despite the prompt international response by many States to sign and ratify the Ottawa Convention — whose humanitarian objectives have gained my Government's sympathy — a number of other States, including Egypt, have numerous reservations about the Convention. Those reservations have been raised at several international forums. We therefore believe that it is necessary to conduct a more comprehensive study of the problem of mines at the international forum devoted to this issue, namely the Conference on Disarmament.

Finally, I would like to express our gratitude to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations Mine Action Service for its praiseworthy efforts in this regard. I would again like to reaffirm Egypt's full readiness to cooperate with the United Nations Mine Action Service on this important issue.

Mr. Bakhit (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The clearance of anti-personnel landmines is one of the fundamental components of post-conflict peace-building, given the enormous number of landmines in the world, the huge costs of mine clearance and the fact that the impact of anti-personnel landmines goes beyond directly endangering persons and property and covers a wide spectrum of socio-economic aspects in mine-affected countries. Given the humanitarian danger anti-personnel landmines represent to civilians, and as one of the African countries affected, the Sudan supports international efforts aimed at eliminating landmines.

The Sudan was one of the first signatories to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. We have taken part in many regional and international conferences seeking the elimination of these devastating weapons. In this regard, the Sudan welcomes the entry into force of the Convention on 11 March 1999 and the outcome of the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention, which was held at Maputo in May of this year.

The General Assembly welcomed Sudan's signature of the Convention in its resolution 53/10 of 17 December 1998 regarding Operation Lifeline Sudan and appealed to the United Nations and the international community to extend the necessary mine clearance assistance to the Sudan.

The Sudan has organized several seminars and conferences within the framework of local mine awareness efforts aimed at receiving domestic and foreign support for mine clearance efforts. Moreover, a national committee on mine clearance was established in 1997, consisting of representatives of the Government, institutions and non-governmental organizations. It has undertaken several mine action activities, identified the needs of the Sudan in the field of mine clearance and developed comprehensive programmes on mine awareness. It has also been urging the international community to extend assistance to support national efforts in mine clearance and to develop national capabilities in both mine clearance and victim rehabilitation.

I would also like to mention the activities undertaken by the Institute for Disaster and Refugee Studies in Khartoum and by the artificial limbs centre, which operates under the Ministry of Social Planning in the Sudan.

The Sudan continues to look forward to receiving international support in the field of technical assistance and advanced technology for mine clearance in the framework of domestic efforts to achieve stability and security for the civilian population.

The United Nations report on anti-personnel landmines issued in April of this year indicated that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has responded to a request by the Sudan for assistance in mine clearance. The Office conducted surveys in the Sudan in 1997 and prepared a report on the question of landmines in the Sudan that reflects the country's financial needs for clearing those mines. However, it is with deep regret that the report indicated a lack of international funding necessary to implement national mine clearance programmes in the Sudan.

While we praise the efforts deployed by the Mine Action Service as the focal point to coordinate mine action within the United Nations, which efforts are reflected in the report of the Secretary-General in document A/54/445 — which also gave details of the activities of agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund and the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Sudan — my country nevertheless hopes that these bodies will continue their efforts to mobilize the necessary funding to assist with mine awareness and victim assistance programmes in the Sudan.

As a signatory to the Ottawa Convention, we hope that all States parties to the Convention will be treated equally with regard to mine clearance assistance and that the focus will not be only on certain geographical regions. We call for international assistance to secure the *materiel*, equipment, technology and financial resources necessary for mine clearance in the mine affected countries.

Mr. Santos (Mozambique): I would like to congratulate the President for the excellent manner in which he is conducting the affairs of the General Assembly.

My delegation commends the inclusion on the agenda of the General Assembly of item 35, entitled "Assistance in mine action", to which my Government attaches great importance.

My delegation has studied with great interest the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/445) and considers the document well balanced and informative.

Landmines are responsible for a large number of casualties and for the suffering of innocent civilians, especially in countries affected by internal conflicts. The widespread and indiscriminate use of landmines has become a characteristic feature mostly of countries in conflict. Landmines represent serious obstacles to political stability and to economic and social development. They impede the reintegration and return of hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons to their fertile land, and they cause economic, environmental and psychological degradation.

As a result of the long years of conflict in Mozambique, about 2 million landmines have been planted. Most of them do not have a clear mapping system. Even in those areas with mapped minefields, natural disasters such as heavy rain and flooding have moved a large number of landmines from their original positions, thus hampering the demining efforts being carried out by my Government with the assistance of the international community. Regardless of the difficulties we are facing in the implementation of various programmes and field activities, my Government remains fully committed to devoting adequate attention to the question of landmines.

In the struggle against landmines, strengthening and enhancing the national capacity of affected countries is of paramount importance. It was within this context that my Government has transformed the National Demining Commission into the National Demining Institute. This move is meant to give the new institution the necessary autonomy, flexibility and effectiveness and to ensure better interaction with our cooperating partners in mine action programmes.

My Government's commitment to put an end to the scourge of landmines is unquestionable and led us to host in Maputo the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on anti-personnel mines. That Meeting adopted the Maputo Declaration, which contains political guidelines and recommendations for the eradication of landmines worldwide. We believe that the international community must sustain the momentum built in Maputo through its full participation in the inter-sessional work taking place in Geneva.

My delegation would like to stress that no government, international agency or non-governmental organization on its own has the capacity to deal with the problem of landmines. Furthermore, there are no quick fixes or single solutions to the humanitarian problems caused by landmines. To achieve tangible results in the struggle against these insidious weapons, we must work together.

The ultimate goal of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction is the total eradication of landmines from our planet. To achieve this objective, we need a comprehensive set of actions that can be tailored to the needs and special conditions of each mine-affected country. In our view, this set of actions includes: mine awareness and the education of children, women, the elderly and communities on the dangers of landmines; disciplined surveys to determine the extent of the problem in the countries seriously affected; demining of priority areas that have important economic and social value, including the provision of equipment, financial support and training to host country deminers, thus enhancing

national demining capacity; and medical, social and psychological assistance for the rehabilitation and reintegration of landmine victims.

The true measure of success in this struggle is not only the total number of landmines removed from the ground, but also the improvement of socio-economic conditions in affected countries. In Mozambique, for instance, we have cleared 6,000 kilometres of roads, and thousands of hectares of farmlands have been put back into cultivation, allowing displaced persons and refugees to return to their homes and resume their normal life.

To achieve the goals envisaged in the Convention on anti-personnel mines, international cooperation and assistance is essential. The international community should strengthen and enhance mine action centres in affected countries in order to empower peoples to address their own problems. The international community should help the countries in need to create and maintain a database of landmines, demining programmes and victim assistance efforts around the world.

These steps, combined with the global humanitarian dimension of mine action, constitute a pragmatic approach towards eliminating the threat of landmines around the world by the year 2010, as envisaged in the Convention. This is a concrete challenge that enjoys the strongest support from the 136 States signatories and 89 ratifiers of the Convention.

Before I conclude, let me emphasize that, as we deal with the landmine issue and its destructive power, we have to reflect thoroughly on how best to eliminate the scourge of anti-personnel mines. We must strengthen the alliance among States and civil society, thus pooling our talents in this great battle against landmines.

Finally, it is our sincere hope that the growing awareness and action on the issue of anti-personnel mines at various levels, including in the Security Council, will result in concrete actions that will relieve the suffering of innocent children, women and elderly persons worldwide. The faster we act, the more lives we save and the more prosperity we create for present and future generations.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): At the outset, I should like to take this opportunity to express the deep appreciation of my delegation to the Secretary-General and other members of the Secretariat of the United Nations, and in particular the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Mine Action Service, as well as to all the countries and non-governmental organizations that have taken initiatives and made efforts to achieve progress in the area of mine action.

Anti-personnel landmines are one of the most urgent problems that the international community faces today. Even now, at the end of the century, more than 110 million landmines remain in the ground in about 70 countries, where they pose a continuing danger to innocent children playing on the ground and diligent farmers working in the field, as well as to peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel.

In the light of the inhumane nature of anti-personnel landmines, which cause human suffering in the most random and brutal manner, the resulting problems must be addressed as a threat to human life, survival and dignity. This is the concept of human security about which Prime Minister Obuchi of Japan is profoundly concerned. I feel strongly that, from the standpoint of ensuring human security, the international community must work together and with perseverance to tackle the issue of landmines.

Not only do these devices claim human lives, but they remain a serious obstacle to reconstruction and development during the post-conflict nation-building process, because the actual or suspected existence of anti-personnel landmines means that access is denied to much-needed resources and services. Even if we assume that no new landmines will be laid, it has been estimated that it would take many decades to totally eliminate existing mines at the present pace of clearing 100,000 a year. As for the cost of demining, while a landmine can be obtained for about $3, it costs the international community between $300 and $1,000 to remove it. This is an intolerable situation.

In the last few years, the international community has made significant progress in combating the evil of landmines by establishing an international legal framework. I am referring, of course, to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which was concluded in September 1997 and which entered into force last March, less than one and a half years later. The Convention can already boast more than 130 signatories and more than 85 ratifiers, Japan being one of them. We held the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention last May in Maputo, where we adopted a Declaration reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the total eradication of anti-

personnel landmines. I would like to urge non-signatory countries to become parties to the Convention as soon as possible.

Japan has extended mine-related assistance for more than 10 years. The Tokyo Conference on Anti-personnel Landmines in March 1997 was the first attempt to deal comprehensively with demining activities and victim assistance. Participants identified three important fields in which international efforts should be strengthened: first, landmine clearance by the United Nations and other organizations; secondly, development of new technology for mine detection and removal; and thirdly, assistance to landmine victims. Each of these three fields embodies a core concept that is the basis for mine action.

At the Ottawa Signing Conference in 1997, then Foreign Minister Obuchi proposed that we establish a goal of "zero victims", and this idea was adopted in the Maputo Declaration by the States parties to the Ottawa Convention. The assistance provided by Japan to realize this objective is based on three principles.

The first principle is ownership. This is the principle that mine-affected countries should play a primary role in mine action activities. For this purpose, it is important for donors to assist mine-affected countries in setting up domestic structures for mine action, with an emphasis on capacity-building. For its part, for example, Japan has supported the establishment of mine action centres in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Cambodia. In these countries, mine action centres have played an important role as a domestic focal point in the establishment and development of national mine clearance, mine awareness and victim assistance capacities. Japan truly hopes that mine action centres recently established with our financial assistance in Chad and Thailand will also prove successful.

The second principle is partnership. It is essential for donor countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations involved in mine action to coordinate their activities. Accordingly, coordination through the United Nations system is important, and Japan wishes to emphasize the important role that the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) plays as the focal point for coordination and the sharing of information on mine action by the related United Nations agencies, regional organizations, national Governments and non-governmental organizations all over the world.

The third principle is human security, a theme I touched on earlier, which refers to all efforts to ensure human survival, well-being and dignity. It is clear that the problem of landmines must be addressed as a threat to human security.

The financial assistance Japan provides through international organizations, non-governmental organizations and bilateral channels has amounted to more than $40 million to date. It includes disbursements to the Afghanistan project and the demining project in Peru managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) respectively, the fund for the Cambodian Mine Action Centre, managed by UNDP, the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action managed by UNMAS, and other institutions, such as the Organization of American States and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Through the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund, Japan has assisted mine action in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Angola, Laos, Yemen, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Thailand, Azerbaijan, Chad and Guatemala in close consultation with UNMAS. Japan is now seeking possibilities of assisting in mine action in Ecuador. At the Ottawa Signing Conference, then Foreign Minister Obuchi announced that Japan would contribute 10 billion yen, or about $80 million in this area over a five-year period beginning in 1998, in order to achieve the goal of "zero victims".

In summary, the position of Japan on the issue of assistance in mine action is based on the three principles. They are ownership, or promoting the efforts of mine-affected countries themselves; partnership, or promoting coordination of the activities of agencies of the United Nations, regional organizations, national Governments and non-governmental organizations; and human security, or promoting the survival, well-being and dignity of all people. Because it is for the well-being of all people that we have dedicated our efforts in this field, it is natural that we should have set for ourselves the goal of "zero victims".

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm that Japan will do its utmost to provide the financial, technological and humanitarian resources necessary to ensure that international efforts are successful in achieving the goal of "zero victims".

Mr. Wang Lei (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China understands the humanitarian concerns of the international community concerning the indiscriminate killing and maiming of innocent civilians by landmines, and supports

the humanitarian efforts in this regard. The Chinese Government attaches great importance to the question of the indiscriminate killing and maiming of civilians by landmines, and supports the appropriate and reasonable regulation of the use of landmines.

Since 1992, the Chinese Government has conducted two large-scale demining activities in the border areas of Yunnan and Guangxi provinces. According to incomplete statistics, over 2.2 million landmines and unexploded ordnance have been cleared, more than 7 million tons of unexploded ordnance have been destroyed, an area of 240 square kilometres has been cleared of landmines and over 170 roads and ports in border areas have been opened. More than 60,000 acres of arable land, grassland, forests and mountains have been reclaimed.

The Chinese Government actively supports and participates in international mine action activities and has capabilities to provide assistance to mine-affected countries. This year and next, there will be 52 trainees from mine-affected countries, and a number of personnel from United Nations agencies will come to China to attend the training workshops conducted by China in cooperation with United Nations agencies. The first workshop is now under way.

China, even as a developing country, has the capacity to join in the efforts of the international community to continue to carry out international assistance in mine action and to open up more peaceful and safe land for mine affected countries.

Mr. Granovsky (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation traditionally attaches great importance to the range of problems surrounding mine clearance, to the mobilization of efforts of the international community to overcome the negative consequences of the danger of mines — which impede the social and economic restoration of States affected by conflicts — and to a solution to urgent humanitarian problems.

We can clearly see the humanitarian aspect of the serious issue of mines, and we consider international cooperation in the area of mine clearance an important part of the solution to the complex task of post-conflict resolution. We understand all too well the sufferings of people in all corners of the globe who have fallen victim to mines, because we, in fact, have first-hand knowledge of this problem. Yearly in the territory of Russia, more than 100,000 unexploded ordnance are discovered and destroyed, and the direct costs for these operations exceed 25 million dollars a year.

We agree to a ban on the production, use, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines as the ultimate objective of agreed international efforts. The Russian Federation favours gradual progress toward this goal through a number of agreed-upon interim stages, including the establishment of viable alternatives to this type of defensive weapon. At this stage we consider as a particularly important objective the providing for the broadest possible participation of members of the international community in the amended Protocol II, the "Mines" Protocol, to the Convention on Inhumane Weapons of 1980, and unswerving compliance with the norms and standards which it has introduced. The basis of this document is a carefully adjusted balance of the interests of States which takes into account their real possibilities, security and self-defense interests. We hope that in the very near future, we will be able to formalize legally our participation in the Protocol.

We are convinced of the urgency of the problem of stepping up efforts of the international community to make fuller use of the potential of States and of the United Nations in mine clearance in areas of regional conflicts. In light of the above, we consider as relevant the problem of improving the convergence of the activities of various United Nations organs and making full use of their knowledge and resources. On the whole, in our view, there are good reasons for having the United Nations play a leading role in the coordination of technical assistance and in organizing national potential for mine clearance. We are also hoping for real additions in the very near future to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Clearance established by the Secretary-General.

For Russia, questions of interaction with the United Nations, exchanges of experience and receiving technical, financial and material assistance are of very real and practical importance. In particular, we are referring to the fact that during the implementation of peacekeeping operations on the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States, complex and costly issues are being resolved with regard to mine clearance localities and objectives.

Russia is ready, on an ever larger scale, to take an active part in rendering assistance in mine clearance on a bilateral or multilateral basis to countries in need. We have acquired impressive scientific, technical and

industrial potential and expertise in the area of mine clearance which could be put to use in future international programmes in this sphere.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to take the floor on behalf of the countries of Central America and the Dominican Republic.

In the first place, we would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on assistance in mine action, document A/54/445, which contains important information on the activities of mine clearance which are under way in various parts of the world.

Mine clearance operations in Central America are a humanitarian task of the greatest importance for the region, since thousands of anti-personnel mines and other explosive devices were planted there indiscriminately over the past decade. These weapons, most of them of produced industrially, are true death-traps for the rural population. Anti-personnel mines have caused loss of human life, of livestock and of domestic animals and have been a constant threat to the civil population. They have blocked the use of vast fertile lands for agriculture, consequently impeding development in general and limiting the increase in work opportunities.

Because of the fact that in many cases mines were planted without any plan and that hurricane Mitch and the resulting floods in November 1998 sometimes managed to redistribute them to new sites and farm fields, the tasks of mine clearance have become more urgent than ever, making the process slower, more dangerous and more costly.

Producing these mines was incredibly cheap, approximately one dollar per mine, which allowed these weapons of war to be easily acquired by the parties in conflicts who planted them, including indiscriminately in border zones of neighbouring countries which had no part in the conflicts. This is the case, for example, of mined territories in Honduras and Costa Rica. In contrast to the cost of production, the cost of removing the mines and detonating them is more than a thousand dollars per mine, without taking into account the human, social and ecological costs resulting from each mine.

In view of the urgency and importance of mine clearance for the peoples of Central America, and upon the request of the affected countries — Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua — in 1991 the Organization of American States (OAS) provided support to the mine-clearance activities being conducted by these countries. The OAS — with the Centre for the Promotion of Democracy providing coordination and supervision, and the Inter-American Defense Board providing technical assistance — made possible the development of a programme to assist Central American demining efforts.

This programme involves the coordinated participation of several components: the donor countries, which are the source of funds; contributing countries members of the OAS which provide specialized demining technology; and the beneficiary countries — in the case of Central America, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua — which, with the help of the other countries, provide the sapper team: young people who are dedicated, disciplined and courageous and who risk their lives in carrying out their very sensitive and dangerous work. Recently, trained dogs have begun to be used, especially to sniff out and detect explosives in a given area. This programme also includes the placing of signs and reducing risks.

It is appropriate to thank those countries that contribute to this Central American demining programme. Some of them, such as Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, the United States, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, are members of the OAS; others, such as Germany, Spain, the Russian Federation, France, the United Kingdom, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland, are permanent observers of the OAS. Special assistance has also been provided by Denmark and Norway.

El Salvador is another country that has suffered from the use of anti-personnel mines. Its Government began a mine-clearance programme under the supervision of the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador, utilizing a sapper team jointly composed of personnel from the El Salvador armed forces and ex-combatants of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional. They have undertaken a variety of mine-clearance programmes. We applaud the cooperation of former enemies that these operations involve.

Anti-personnel mines cause unnecessary harm, and we believe it is unnecessary to prove the tremendous burden for the entire medical systems of each of our countries of providing medical and social assistance to the victims of mines, from the evacuation of the wounded right through to his rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Thus we believe it is very important to point out

the joint programme of Mexico, Canada and the Pan American Health Organization for caring for victims of anti-personnel mines in El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. This programme has been structured to deal with both the physical and psychological rehabilitation of the survivors of mine explosions.

The United Nations and its agencies have also made a significant contribution to demining operations in Central America. The United Nations Children's Fund has been conducting educational programmes on the dangers of mines in various regions where this scourge remains. In response to a request for assistance from the President of Nicaragua, a project of the United Nations Mine Action Service has made it possible to demine a 527,000-square-metre area around four bridges that were destroyed by floods caused by hurricane Mitch along the northern section of the main road between Managua and Honduras.

The will of our Governments to eliminate these deadly devices has been reiterated in various forms, one of which was the ratification by our countries of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction — the Ottawa Convention. Another manifestation of this will was the joint declaration of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs at the meeting on the progress of Central American demining activities, which was held on 13 April 1999. This declaration reaffirms the commitment of our Governments to the tasks of demining and destroying explosive devices, as well as the firm will to complete as soon as possible national mine-destruction programmes.

In conclusion, we appeal to the international donor community to continue to cooperate with demining programmes in Central America in order to rid the region of this scourge and let it become a zone free from anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Khan (Pakistan): My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his report on assistance in mine action, contained in document A/54/445.

Pakistan remains deeply concerned about the serious problem caused by the indiscriminate use of landmines, a problem that is deeply affecting the lives of millions of ordinary people in more than 60 developing countries, including Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Iraq, Mozambique and Somalia. The problem continues to manifest itself in various forms. It impedes the effective execution of peacekeeping operations, rehabilitation of refugees and displaced persons, and post-conflict rebuilding and reconstruction.

Pakistan appreciates the growing international interest in dealing with this problem in its totality. Over the past few years concerted efforts have been made to sensitize world public opinion about the seriousness and magnitude of the problem caused by the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines. In this regard, my delegation notes with appreciation the positive contribution made by the United Nations. Efforts to achieve an integrated and coherent approach encompassing the entire United Nations system are likely to yield positive results.

We continue to follow with great interest the broad range of activities undertaken by the United Nations on landmines-related issues since the designation of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations as the overall focal point and the United Nations Mine Action Service as the operational focal point on these issues. We welcome and remain supportive of various steps that have been taken to further strengthen the role and capabilities of the United Nations in this vitally important area.

We have noted with interest the change in terminology from "mine clearance" to "mine action", with a view to adopting a much broader and holistic approach to dealing with the landmines issue. While welcoming this broader focus it is essential not to lose sight of the fact that actual demining and mine clearance on the ground remains at the heart of efforts to deal with this problem. Although mine-awareness and advocacy campaigns are important facets of an overall strategy, these activities should in no way divert resources or attention from demining and mine clearance.

Similarly, global conferences and international instruments on landmines should focus greater attention on the need for more resources for actual demining operations in the countries afflicted by this problem. It is a matter of concern that resources for these activities have not shown the desired increase, even though the international community today is more sensitized than ever before to the seriousness and gravity of the landmines crisis. It is hoped that the international community, especially the developed countries, will contribute more resources to overcome this challenge. Pakistan for its part has actively contributed to demining operations all over the world. Our participation in demining operations in Kuwait, Cambodia, Angola, Eastern Slovenia and Western Sahara reflects our

commitment to dealing with the crisis caused by the indiscriminate use of landmines.

In our view, the issue of mine action needs to be differentiated from the demands for controlling or banning the use of landmines. The question of control of the use of landmines raises issues that lie in the realm of disarmament. These issues should be dealt with in the Conference on Disarmament. In this context, Pakistan favours the initiation of negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament on an international legal instrument banning the transfer/export of anti-personnel landmines.

Pakistan imposed a moratorium on the export of landmines in March 1997. This moratorium has been reinforced by the issuance of an appropriate notification by the Government of Pakistan completely banning the export of anti-personnel mines. We have also ratified the amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. We look forward to participating constructively in the First Annual Conference of High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II, to be held in Geneva this year. Pakistan has submitted information required under article 11 (2) and article 13 (4) of the amended Protocol II to the United Nations, which will be available to the participants of the Conference of High Contracting Parties. Steps now need to be taken to ensure universal adherence to the amended Protocol II of the Convention. We remain ready to consider further measures and initiatives in relevant multilateral forums to address the problems arising out of the indiscriminate use of landmines.

Mr. Tudela (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the end of the twentieth century, after two World Wars and innumerable local conflicts, we find that anti-personnel landmines continue to be used in different areas of the planet. Two thirds of the world's countries are contaminated by these weapons, which have indiscriminate and deadly consequences that, by rendering inaccessible the areas where they are sown, will be felt for many years.

The permanence of anti-personnel landmines exacerbates tensions, undermines trust and obstructs diplomatic efforts to achieve a peaceful solution to conflicts. That is why the goal of the complete elimination of anti-personnel landmines remains a priority for Peru and for all those States that seek to eliminate this threat.

Peru has participated since the beginning in the process that led to the adoption of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, and was one of the first countries to ratify it. We therefore hail its entry into force in March this year.

The First Meeting of the States Parties in May in Maputo, Mozambique, and the Maputo Declaration that emerged from the Meeting, are important political expressions that strengthen the universalization of the Convention. We therefore believe it necessary for those States that are not yet parties to the Convention to sign it and for the signatory countries to ratify it as soon as possible. The Meeting served to establish certain principles for the application of the Convention and five standing committees of experts for the execution of its work programme. Peru is a member of the standing committee of experts on mine clearance, which held its first session last September.

We believe that it is highly important to continue to work to achieve the implementation of the goals and provisions of the Ottawa Convention. Our country therefore believes it necessary to review the demining standards and the criteria used to decide the assignment of international cooperation; to reassert the existence of links between mine removal and the consolidation of peace and mutual trust between neighbouring countries; the possible participation of armed forces in demining operations; and the need for the primacy of national decisions in the planning and management of mine-action programmes.

In the work of demining, we should also bear in mind the fact that the Ottawa Convention complements other international mechanisms on this subject; the ecological value of the areas of acknowledged biodiversity; the preservation of traditional anthropological patterns; the priority to be given to cooperation aimed at training national authorities in charge of planning and managing programmes of anti-landmine measures within affected countries; the acknowledgment of the contribution that the regional coordination mechanisms for demining, such as the Organization of American States, can offer; and the advisability of exchanging experiences with other affected countries, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations Development Programme.

Peru also believes that the affected countries must decide whether their armed forces are capable of demining and that international cooperation must assign priority to the training in all areas that is required by medium-and long-term anti-mine measures. We share the

position in favour of linking demining plans with specific development projects.

Consistent with its position against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and those with injurious and indiscriminate effect, in 1997 Peru ratified the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and its Protocols, including Amended Protocol II on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-traps and Other Devices.

We welcome the First Annual Conference of the High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II, to be held from 15 to 17 December this year in Geneva. We also wish to state that Peru has complied with its obligation, in its capacity as a country that has ratified and deposited the Convention, to submit to the Secretary-General its first annual report, in accordance with article 13 (4) of the amended Protocol II.

Within the regional framework, Peru, together with other States, has promoted and supported the decision to make the western hemisphere a zone free of anti-personnel landmines and the creation of a register of anti-personnel landmines. It has also created a specific mechanism for international cooperation, consisting of a regional list of demining experts, in order to supplement the efforts of the States to translate the provisions of the Ottawa Convention into reality within their respective territories. It has also proposed a project to contribute to the universalization of the Ottawa Convention in the Americas by creating a group of personalities to publicize the Convention and its scope throughout civil society.

Universalization and cooperation are two essential aspects we must consider if we wish to achieve genuine implementation of the Ottawa Convention. Concerted international efforts should not be limited to the prohibition of anti-personnel landmines. They should also include financial and technical assistance to the countries affected by the mines, specifically for their removal and for humanitarian assistance to mine victims and survivors.

The Peruvian delegation wishes to express its gratitude for the extensive and substantive report submitted by the Secretary-General on this subject. We are pleased to see that the policy laid down by the United Nations on the coordination of efforts, activities and resources is now more effective. We make an appeal that the United Nations Mine Action Service activities be supplied with sufficient and foreseeable financial resources that will allow it to develop its coordination tasks properly.

We also believe that it is important to develop national awareness and extensive coordination at the national level to build sustainable national capacity. Access to new technologies for the removal of anti-personnel mines is also fundamental.

At the national level Peru has established a juridical and institutional framework that supplements international activities on mines. An inter-sectorial coordination group has been set up to evaluate and recommend the political, legal and administrative measures that must be adopted in order to implement the Ottawa Convention in Peru. Some of the measures recommended by that group have already been approved, including in particular the steps taken so that the armed forces and police forces reconvert the facilities used to manufacture mine prototypes and withdraw, inventory and destroy mines in order to protect the basic infrastructure, to train national personnel in tasks related to demarcation of mined areas, to remove, deactivate and destroy mines and to facilitate the rehabilitation of the victims.

Peru began mine removal from its territory in December 1996, under a two-stage programme. The first stage was mine removal associated with the demarcation of the Peruvian-Ecuadorian border, which, under mutual agreement with Ecuador, was performed with national resources and the supplementary technical and financial support of four friendly countries: Canada, Spain, the United States and Japan, to whom we reaffirm our gratitude for their swift and favourable acceptance of our requests for assistance. I have the pleasure of reporting that that stage was concluded last May.

The second stage consists of medium- and long-term national mine removal, a task which is undergoing evaluation and logistics planning. Due to the magnitude of the problem and the climatic and geographic characteristics of mined zones, we believe that this stage can be executed within the time-frame stipulated by the Ottawa Convention only if we can gain access to technical and financial cooperation and to logistical support given by other States parties to the Ottawa Convention, non-governmental organizations and international organizations that are committed to the cause of achieving a world free of anti-personnel mines.

It is obvious that such measures are extremely expensive, particularly for a developing country such as

Peru. In this context, we wish to emphasize that a fund specifically for support of mine removal in Peru has been opened within the framework of the Organization of American States in order to continue receiving international cooperation for projects for prevention, assistance to victims and gradual demining throughout our national territory.

As in former years, Peru has co-sponsored the draft resolution which is being submitted on this subject, which we hope the General Assembly will again adopt by consensus.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. as the first item.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

United Nations A/54/PV.58

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

58th plenary meeting
Friday, 19 November 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Statement on the occasion of the tenth Africa Industrialization Day

The President: I should like to remind the General Assembly that tomorrow, 20 November, is the tenth Africa Industrialization Day.

Within the framework of the Second Industrial Development Decade for Africa, from 1993 to 2002, the General Assembly proclaimed 20 November Africa Industrialization Day. I wish to say a few words to mark the occasion, which offers a unique opportunity to reflect on the progress of industry in a continent of vast untapped potentials.

At the onset of the first Industrial Development Decade for Africa (1980-1989), industry in Africa was in a precarious state, with very little flow of foreign direct investments to this sector. Today, after years of decline in manufacturing output, basic industries are slowly being revitalized and there has been an upsurge in industrial production in many countries of the subregions of Africa.

With the globalization of economic activities, Africa faces a number of challenges. The continent is yet to adequately define workable policies and structures to meet the demands of the changing global business environment. At the same time, there are opportunities for African countries to establish meaningful alliances with other countries in Europe, Asia and the Americas. For example, the United States trade and investment initiative for Africa could contribute significantly to transforming the agro-based industrial sector in Africa, thereby creating avenues for income generation and, invariably, poverty eradication.

Whereas, in the 1960s the critical factor inputs for industrialization in Africa were capital and skilled labour, today, as we approach the new millennium, one of the major challenges to the African countries is access to technology — in particular information technology — to impact on policy development, determine products for markets and improve industrial competitiveness.

For Africa to become a competitive partner in the global economy, concrete steps need to be taken to transform the continent's enormous natural resources into manufactured products that will satisfy the basic needs of its peoples. In this regard, African countries, with the support of the development partners and the multilateral agencies, should redouble their efforts in developing small and medium-sized enterprises throughout the continent.

In recent years, there has been much emphasis on good governance, including macroeconomic management. However, good governance and macroeconomic management per se will not transform the industrial landscape of Africa, nor will they put in place the fundamental prerequisites for partnership in a globalized society.

99-86515 (E)

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The role of the private sector in economic development, particularly industrial development, is widely acknowledged as a critical factor. Many African economies are slowly being transformed from public-sector-driven economies into a private-sector-led reconstruction and development. But the private sector needs the support of Governments in terms of ensuring that the enabling environment in which they operate is conducive to productivity and growth. In addition, Governments should support research and development aimed at adding value to natural resources, especially agricultural raw materials.

The private sector is expected to play a lead role in Africa's industrialization. Yet in most cases it is extremely weak, has limited access to finance and technology, is unaccustomed to global business management and for a number of exogenous factors has not quite succeeded in establishing strategic alliances with the business community in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Nevertheless, this sector's role in Africa's industrialization has to be sustained. Governments and the international community have taken many initiatives at the country level to strengthen the capacities and the resource base of the private sector so that it can effectively participate in the industrial development process of the continent. I would like to commend African countries and their international cooperating partners for the new thrust that has been given to private sector development in the continent through smart partnership, for a win-win outcome.

The theme that has been chosen to herald the millennium, in my view, succinctly summarizes the efforts of African countries throughout this century and gives a meaningful assessment of the priority needs of Africa, as well as full recognition of where its competitive advantages lie. The theme "From farm to factory for a better future" embodies my firm belief that Africa, with its endowment of diverse agricultural resources, most of which are industrial raw materials that could be transformed to provide adequate food for the peoples of Africa, could simultaneously improve agricultural productivity, as well as increase utilization of its manufacturing capacity for food security.

In this connection, the organizations of the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Food and Agriculture Organization, must work closely together in helping Africa to successfully produce agricultural raw materials on a sustainable basis. They should also assist African countries in effectively and efficiently processing such raw materials at the national and subregional levels in order to ensure a stable source of income for the majority of the farming communities in Africa and to provide employment for both the rural and urban populations at the factory level.

It now remains for me to once again bring to the attention of the international community Africa's efforts, its problems and constraints and the challenges the continent faces in an increasingly globalized society, including in particular the challenge of African debt cancellation. I am confident that the international community will step up its support to Africa in the coming millennium and that Governments and the private sector in Africa will succeed in building a better future for its peoples.

In concluding, let me remind all delegations of resolution 53/92, of 7 December 1998, requesting the President, in the preparation of the agenda of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, to establish an open-ended ad hoc working group to monitor the implementation of that resolution, and in particular the recommendations of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa. To this end, I have started consultations concerning the implementation of that resolution.

Agenda item 35 (*continued*)

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/445)

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines): There was a time when my country was considered by the United Nations a mine-affected country. But realizing the overwhelming humanitarian imperative against the use of landmines rather early on, the Philippines abandoned their use.

This was a conscious decision, based on humanitarian considerations and even before global attention was focused on the landmine problem. This decision was part of my Government's integrated approach in addressing the problem of armed groups, an approach that does not rely entirely on military solutions, but focuses more on the fundamental social and economic problems that fuel illegal armed groups. Today the Philippines is no longer categorized by the United Nations as a mine-affected area.

Agriculture has been and remains an important part of the lives of our people, our economy and our national survival. In the longer term, the presence of landmines or the fear that landmines might still be present would have ensured that many agricultural lands would remain untilled and unused, depriving the farmer and his community of livelihood and economic development.

Having taken to heart that renouncing the use of landmines is a humanitarian imperative, the Philippines was determined to see the Ottawa Convention through. We actively participated in the Ottawa process, and we have signed the Convention and welcome its entry into force this year. We hope to deposit our instrument of ratification shortly. We are currently formulating draft legislation that would criminalize the manufacture, possession, sale or transshipment of landmines and components clearly intended to be used in landmines.

The Philippines has hosted several regional mine action meetings, several of which were conducted in cooperation with non-governmental organizations. The Philippines is also actively improving its mine action and clearance capacity, primarily with a view to taking a more active part in these activities in our region.

We joined others in Maputo to map out the implementation of the Convention, and we strongly support the action plan and inter-sessional meetings and processes related to the Ottawa Convention that were agreed upon in Maputo. I understand the concerns of the delegations that have opted not to give prominence to the Ottawa Convention in our draft resolution. But I hope that one day all of us will recognize the singular importance of this Convention in all our efforts in mine action and in eventually achieving the goal of zero victims.

The Philippines agrees completely with the Secretary-General, who states in his report that the role of non-governmental organizations has been indispensable in facing the challenges of mine action. Non-governmental organization participation is crucial, not only in mine clearance but also in mine awareness. This active role of non-governmental organizations must continue, and the Philippines hopes that at some point in the future, we can finally include consensus language in our resolution that will give due credit to the great work done in mine action by individuals and non-governmental organizations.

We join others in recognizing the importance of the central coordinating role of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian mine action worldwide. The United Nations is moving in the right direction by making sure that assessment missions and national surveys continue to be a key element in mine action activities. Making the development of an information management system a priority is also an important step, and in this regard, we would like to recognize the critical role played by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.

The United Nations response to the mine problem has been swift and meaningful. One of the major challenges we recognized early on was the important transition of the United Nations Mine Action Service from a policy body to an implementation agency. This has been done, and done well. As a result, United Nations inter-agency coordination, cooperation and resource management have been optimized. We hope to see similar success when the United Nations Mine Action Service continues to work with its external partners.

We support the activities of the United Nations Mine Action Service, but we want to emphasize that mine action should not be done solely within the framework of peacekeeping; it should also be done in a broader humanitarian framework. However, we recognize that mine clearance has been an unavoidable part of peacekeeping activities, as it is important to make sure that our peacekeepers remain safe and able to carry out their mandate.

But mine action can, and does, often outlast peacekeeping activities, and we are happy to see that the transition in these cases has been successful and effective. We must also make sure that, despite the need for a global approach, mine action should be somewhat country-specific in the light of the diverse capabilities, dissimilar situations and environments of mine-affected States. This centralized coordination has resulted in bringing about a clearer picture of the current status of the landmine problem. Although much has been achieved, this picture shows that much remains to be done.

Technology has been an important factor in our efforts in addressing the mine problem. We have seen Governments and the private sector working hand-in-hand to come up with the necessary technology and equipment. We are encouraged by the fact that even the States that are not entirely with us in the Ottawa Convention are actively helping out, not only with financial and other resources but also by sharing advanced mine detection technology.

I only hope that as we develop the technology that could neutralize the deadly effect of landmines, hopefully rendering them useless, we will not witness any attempts to make landmines that can overcome this technology. Not only would this make the total eradication of landmines more difficult, but parties to conflicts might put even a higher premium on landmines as instruments of war. We must make sure that technology in this case will always be a blessing and not a curse.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report. It gives a clear idea of where we are now and the challenges that we need to overcome. I would also like to express our appreciation to the European Union and its individual member States for their crucial role in mine action. We join them in their firm commitment to mine action. The European Union, as well as other States, including Japan, have given much to ensure that global mine action remains a priority for all of us. The Voluntary Trust Fund remains viable because of them.

Finally, I would like to express our continued support for the countries that continue to be plagued by this difficult problem. Individual national actions have been strong and effective, even in difficult and crisis situations. We are all inspired and encouraged by the dedication and sacrifice of their leaders and people.

Mr. Türk (Slovenia): Slovenia associated itself with the statement made by the European Union on assistance in mine action. Additionally, we wish to contribute several specific points to the present discussion.

International mine action is one of the most important, most practical and most effective international projects of our time. It is firmly based on the principle of the prohibition of weapons which have excessively injurious or indiscriminate effects and the principles of protection of civilians in armed conflict. It is an indispensable component of the evolving concept of human security. It is legally defined in the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and in other relevant instruments of international law. It has given rise to a wide variety of practical activities aimed at an eventual total elimination of anti-personnel mines worldwide. These and other aspects of international mine action make it one of the most important priorities of the United Nations.

It is necessary to emphasize that the current assistance in mine action has given rise to a comprehensive understanding of the concept of mine action. That concept includes demining and destruction of landmines, rehabilitation of mine victims and the creation of mine awareness.

The implementation of provisions of international instruments regarding demining and destruction of landmines must be the first priority. This is necessary not only to thwart the recurrence of a conflict, but also to minimize the land area restricted by infestation and to expedite the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to both their zones and their livelihoods. Rehabilitation of mine victims is an important condition of normalization after a conflict and, perhaps most importantly, the way to restore both productivity and the human dignity of those most severely affected.

Mine awareness needs to be created and supported as a part of the effort to mobilize the population for post-conflict activities. Peace cannot be sustained, and development cannot thrive, in an atmosphere in which an explosion could wound any one at any time. Successful mine action — that is, action successful in all of the three main areas — strengthens both peace and development.

Slovenia is deeply committed to the objectives of international mine action and believes that the United Nations Member States can contribute to its success in a variety of practical ways. In this context, I wish to refer to a specific experience of Slovenia following the establishment of the International Trust Fund for Demining and Rehabilitation of Mine Victims in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Two years ago, the idea was developed in Slovenia to set up an organization which would, in the spirit of the Ottawa Convention and within the general foreign policy orientation of our country, offer assistance to the nearby countries in our neighbourhood. A large number of mines and other unexploded ordnance remained in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the end of the war, and they claimed victims every day. They prevented the population from returning to their homes and normal lives, as well as preventing refugees from going back to their homes. We therefore decided to set up the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victim Rehabilitation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through joint efforts and donations made by other United Nations Member States after the first donor conference in 1998, we have thus far managed to clear more than 2.5 million square metres of contaminated area in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to rehabilitate more than 200 mine victims.

The International Trust Fund has been successful in its endeavours to provide demining in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The operation undertaken within its framework has thus far this year demined about two thirds of the entire mine contaminated area in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In recent months, the Fund started activities in Kosovo and Croatia, which are included among the projects of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe.

The Fund's operations are action-oriented, with minimum administrative costs, which do not exceed 3 per cent of donations. Slovenia is grateful for the support of a large number of Member States to the Fund and would like to emphasize that their donations have helped in the most effective manner.

Every United Nations Member State can contribute to assistance in mine action. Many of the contributions are practical; others consist in political support and awareness-raising. All are important and need to be recognized as such by the General Assembly. Slovenia is actively participating in the process of finalizing the draft resolution under the present agenda item and looks forward to its adoption by consensus.

Ms. Ramírez (Argentina) *(spoke in Spanish):* Almost every day we read in the newspapers moving stories of children and adults, civilians and soldiers, who are randomly and senselessly victimized by anti-personnel mines, horrendous weapons that do not discriminate.

The signing of the Ottawa Convention signified a crucial step forward in efforts for safety and security, non-proliferation and disarmament. Argentina deposited its instrument of ratification on 14 September 1999.

The rapidity with which the Ottawa Convention obtained the number of ratifications necessary for its entry into force attests to the importance that much of the international community attaches to the principles and objectives enshrined in the Convention and its commitment to the goal of putting an end to suffering, death and destruction.

We must remember that even with the entry into force of the Convention, the task has not been completed and that it is important for those countries that have not yet done so to sign the Convention as soon as possible in order to facilitate coordinated and effective action by the international community to mitigate the consequences of the indiscriminate use of these weapons in various parts of the planet.

The total and complete prohibition of such weapons must go hand in hand with cooperation for mine clearance and assistance to the victims, who must receive special consideration. These are fundamental and complementary aspects that will alleviate their suffering and open the way for the development of affected countries.

The devastating impact upon populations and their livelihoods when useful land becomes unproductive, depriving millions of human beings of the ability to earn a living, is a problem whose social and economic dimension cannot be ignored.

My country's commitment is reflected in a practical way by its contribution to international cooperation for humanitarian demining, an activity to which we attach special importance. By way of example, we could mention the participation of Argentine military personnel in various demining programmes, the training, guidance and instruction given in Argentina to officers of other countries' armed forces and our participation in international forums.

The Argentine armed forces have been taking part in mine clearance programmes since 1993. That year, in the Republic of Nicaragua, in a programme implemented by the Organization of American States (OAS), through the Inter-American Defence Board, more than 5,000 mines were destroyed in the course of one year. In 1997 Argentina took part in the reopening of the project in Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala under the auspices of the OAS Centre for the Promotion of Democracy.

Similarly, assistance in demining in Angola, the participation of a company of engineers of the Argentine army in the framework of the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) and the presence of Argentine military experts in Central America are some of the specific actions undertaken by Argentina.

In December 1993 the Government of Argentina made an offer to the United Kingdom to take charge of the removal of landmines emplaced in the Malvinas Islands by the Argentine armed forces during the 1982 conflict. The proposal was based on humanitarian considerations and was an act of goodwill intended to improve the well-being and quality of life of the

islanders. The offer was accepted by the British Government, and at present the Foreign Ministries of the two countries are exchanging ideas on the form of a possible bilateral understanding to conduct a feasibility study. Such a study is indispensable before any mine clearance work can take place.

Argentina provides highly qualified personnel for training people in demining, and we aim to increase our participation year by year. To this end, we have a centre which provides training and instruction in demining to Argentine and foreign military personnel, as well as mobile demining teams, which represent a further step in terms of education.

Argentina's conviction and determination with respect to international efforts to eradicate and prohibit mines throughout the world was evident even before the signature of the Ottawa Convention, through the establishment in 1995 of a moratorium on the export, sale or transfer of all anti-personnel mines without exception.

With respect to the humanitarian dimension of the problems caused by mines, we believe it appropriate to stress the contribution made by Argentina through what is called the "White Helmets" initiative. This institution brings together volunteers from various countries who are specialized in humanitarian assistance. They make themselves available to the international community, under the leadership of the United Nations, and can be called upon by affected countries or multilateral organizations.

Far from harming the security of States, the implementation of the Ottawa Convention may well constitute an important confidence-building measure between countries of the same region. This intent was expressed, even before the Oslo meeting, by the States members of the Rio Group, who pledged to respect the terms of the Convention since it benefits the countries of the Latin American region.

Within the framework of the OAS, the demining programme in Central America has shown itself to be an extremely important initiative not only because of its successes on the basis of concerted international cooperation, but also because of the goal of declaring the hemisphere a zone free of anti-personnel mines, in accordance with OAS resolutions. The Political Declaration of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), Bolivia and Chile as a zone of peace is also a key instrument for strengthening confidence and security in the region, and it commits signatory States to carry out efforts to that end.

The Ottawa Convention, by enshrining fundamental principles of international humanitarian law, attempts to increase common efforts aimed at assisting the victims of this scourge. Providing that assistance and removing mines constitute the great task of the years to come.

Mr. Hughes (New Zealand): First of all, I would like to join other speakers in thanking the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on this item, contained in document A/54/445.

In the year since the General Assembly last considered this matter, the Ottawa Convention has entered into force at an admirable pace. New Zealand signed the Convention on the first day it was open for signature and subsequently ratified it in January this year. We would urge those Member States that are yet to ratify the Convention to do so as soon as possible.

As part of its long-standing commitment, New Zealand continues to engage actively in mine action efforts. New Zealand Defence Force personnel have participated in demining operations in Afghanistan and Angola and continue to do so in Cambodia and Mozambique, as well as in the unexploded ordnance programme in Laos. Most recently they have been involved in the setting up the Kosovo Mine Action Coordination Centre. We continue to contribute financially to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action and the Laos and Cambodia trust funds. We remain keen to explore further ways of putting our proven expertise to good use.

The laying of new mines in Angola this year as hostilities resumed is particularly deplorable. New Zealand had a long-standing involvement in mine action efforts in Angola, and it was disheartening to see United Nations mine action efforts reduced and shut down after so much work.

On a more positive note, we greatly welcomed the outcomes of the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, held in Maputo in May this year, including the establishment of its inter-sessional work programme and the adoption of article 7 reporting formats. We are pleased that the formats enable countries to submit their reports electronically and welcome the decision of the Department for Disarmament Affairs to compile the reports into a database that is accessible on

the Internet. This is an important and cost-effective commitment to transparency and information sharing.

We also pay tribute to the hard work of the United Nations Mine Action Service over the past year, including its key role in the speedy establishment of the Kosovo Mine Action Coordination Centre.

Over the past year, the momentum behind the Ottawa process has continued. That momentum draws strength from the diversity of the advocates of the Ottawa process, be they Governments, non-governmental organizations, international organizations or the ordinary man or woman on the street. We were pleased to see that the first meeting of the inter-sessional standing committees of experts continued the Ottawa spirit of inclusivity and engagement.

The Ottawa process has encouraged us to maximize limited expertise and resources in mine action. Effective coordination and planning of all of mine action activities will be crucial if we are to meet the goals set out in the Convention. We cannot afford duplication of effort and wasted resources. New Zealand welcomes attempts made within the United Nations thus far to achieve this end. The establishment of a clear division of labour between the various United Nations entities and of coordinating mechanisms such as the Inter-Agency Coordination Group is to be applauded.

We are also particularly encouraged by the development of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and the United Nations Mine Action Service. Both IMSMA and the conduct of level-one surveys should greatly assist both mine affected States and mine action entities in setting their mine action priorities and national work plans. New Zealand encourages the development and use of these tools to achieve maximum effectiveness in mine action programmes.

Effective and transparent management processes are essential if donor confidence is to be maintained. It is unfortunate that earlier this year donor confidence in the Cambodia Mine Action Centre was shaken by allegations of fraud and mismanagement. As a long-standing donor to that Centre, we are pleased to see that the Cambodian Government, the Centre and the United Nations Development Programme have undertaken a programme of management and financial reform aimed at dealing with the problems and restoring donor confidence in the Centre. We understand that a final report on the full reform measures to be undertaken will be provided to donors later this month. While there is clearly a long way to go, New Zealand welcomes the progress that has been made and looks forward to CMAC providing a full and positive response to the management concerns that have been raised by donors.

Given the extent of the challenges facing countries with mined territories, mine action programmes must be sustainable. It is imperative that countries are encouraged to develop their own national programmes. The impressive achievements of the accelerated demining programme in Mozambique testify to the effectiveness of indigenized programmes. This has been a key aim of the involvement of New Zealand personnel in mine clearance.

Finally, we are pleased to co-sponsor the important draft resolution before us on this item.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): We long for a day when civilian life will be free from the threat of anti-personnel landmines. These haunting echoes of shots fired long ago and conflicts raging miles away have no place in civil society. They are a tragic outgrowth of war when they strike innocents, shattering civilian lives and tormenting families. And yet, in the shadow of tragedy, a glimmer of hope arises. People from various nations who clashed on the battlefields of yesterday are clearing the minefields of today. This indeed captures the most important theme of the effort against the devastation of anti-personnel landmines: cooperation. The report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action reaffirms the discovery that took hold barely 10 years ago that action by individual States alone can no longer quell the humanitarian threat posed by anti-personnel landmines.

It should be emphasized that landmines are creatures of context: they are born in an atmosphere of terror and threats, just as they are weakened in the context of cooperation and goodwill between States. Such cooperation provides impetus to the international community as a whole. I can point to several small examples from the perspective of my own battle-scarred country to illustrate this principle.

The Jordan Valley is still infested with anti-personnel landmines planted decades ago. Israel and Jordan, which forged a Treaty of Peace in 1994, have now launched a large-scale project to demine the Jordan Valley. The project covers all facets in the fight against anti-personnel landmines, from actually demining the landscape to warning the population at large and

rehabilitating the victims. On the heels of this combined effort, a broader cooperative venture was launched. Canada and Norway lent their resources and expertise to the Jordan Valley project as part of their overall efforts to reduce the effects of anti-personnel landmines. Now other nations have expressed interest in joining the Jordan Valley project. Cooperation, it seems, is contagious.

However, even the most thorough demining projects will not suffice, in our region or anywhere else in the world, unless they are accompanied by a parallel effort to educate the general population. As outlined in paragraph 19 of the Secretary-General's report, information-management techniques must be used to ensure that mine-affected communities can "coexist safely with a mine threat". To this end, Israel and other nations have taken an active role in the Mine Awareness Project launched by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Angola. Our volunteers and those of other nations have worked to educate the population, treat victims and set up a special database. For its part, Israel took steps to help meet the programme's financial needs. The coordinator of the UNICEF project, Mr. Hanoch Barlevi of Israel, reported that the Angola experience offered valuable lessons for other mine-affected areas.

It is clear that nothing captures more starkly the tragic consequences of anti-personnel landmines than the stories of the victims themselves. But perhaps one story, with which I will close, can offer a positive inspiration.

Ibrahim Waradat, 12 years old, grew up in the Ramatiya district on the Jordanian-Syrian border. He was badly injured several years ago when he happened upon a landmine that exploded; he lost an arm, several fingers of the other hand and his left eye. The shame of his injury left him unwilling to attend school. After Queen Noor met the boy at an international conference, Jordanian and Israeli authorities began working together to treat landmine victims like him. He was the first child to be admitted to the rehabilitation centre at Beit Levinstein in Raanana. Following many months of cooperation between the two nations and local doctors, and with the aid of artificial prosthetics, Ibrahim returned to Jordan, where he was greeted at a special ceremony attended by Prince Raed and Israel's representative in Amman. The boy is now back in school.

Let us hope that the cooperation that healed Ibrahim will likewise heal the world of the devastation caused by these devices and put an end to the hostilities that perpetuate them.

Mr. Sun (Cambodia): On behalf of the Cambodian delegation, allow me first of all to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on "Assistance in Mine Action" (A/54/445), which addresses the continued problem of landmines. The report also provides us with the opportunity to assess the progress achieved so far by the mine-affected countries and by the world community in the process of their cooperation in the eradication of landmines.

Landmines still pose a serious threat to more than 60 countries worldwide. Nearly a third of the world's nations are to some extent contaminated by landmines and unexploded ordnance. Among the countries most severely affected are least developed countries that are struggling to provide their societies with even the most basic necessities.

Cambodia is among those countries whose people have suffered a great deal from landmines. Due to the legacy of more than two decades of conflict, landmines have already killed tens of thousands of people and maimed tens of thousands more. Landmine survivors — men, women and children — make up a part of the social landscape of today's Cambodia.

Since 1992, Cambodia has been waging a struggle against landmines. The first step taken by the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), in cooperation with the then Supreme National Council of Cambodia (SNC), was to form the Cambodian Mine Action Centre in order to respond to the country's urgent need to embark on demining programmes and related activities, with initial support by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other donor countries and relevant international organizations.

Thanks to the constant and generous assistance of the world community, the Cambodian Mine Action Centre has been able to take steps towards reducing this immense problem. Recently it has benefited from the use of new technologies and improved demining methods and equipment. In the past few years the implementation of demining programmes has resulted in well-known achievements in related activities, in particular as concerns progress in operational activities in the minefields and in the Cambodian training programme, as well as in capacity-building at the country level and the launching of a mine-awareness campaign among the population.

At the recent meeting of the standing committees of experts of the Ottawa Convention, held in Geneva, Cambodia was recognized as a mine-affected country whose struggle against landmines has succeeded in reducing the rate of mine accidents considerably. With the ongoing operational activities in the minefields, this trend will continue. There are also indications that 23 per cent of the land thought to be mined throughout the country has been cleared.

Despite the improvements that have been made, however, the mine problem in Cambodia continues to be a major obstacle. It is believed that the number of mines that are still active in rural areas of Cambodia varies from 4 million to 6 million, not to mention unexploded ordnance from previous conflicts. In this respect, as peace prevails throughout the country, my Government has reiterated its commitment to devote greater efforts to demining. It reaffirms its continued strategy to address the mine problem in the years ahead as a priority in the overall framework of the programme of rehabilitation and development. In order to strengthen this effort, Cambodia has completed its legislation process on the relevant issues. The national law on the ban on landmines has already entered into force, after its promulgation by His Majesty the King in May this year.

In addition, on 22 May 1999, the Prime Minister issued a seven-point declaration relating to the immediate policy of the Royal Government to accelerate the process of demining in a more efficient and effective manner. It is noteworthy that in spite of its financial constraints, the Government has for the first time clearly earmarked its financial contribution in the national budget approved by the National Assembly for the current fiscal year.

It should also be noted that this year, the Cambodian Mine Action Centre has undertaken a programme of change in its leadership and vast reforms in its organizational structure, with the aim of improving its management and ensuring credibility and transparency. The process of reform is consistent with the policy of the Government to reflect the reality and necessity in the country as well as to meet international requirements. The role that the Centre has played so far in contributing to the achievement of this humanitarian objective should be appreciated.

My country has joined international efforts to strengthen cooperation in resolving the landmine problem. As one of the countries victims of landmines, Cambodia supports all initiatives leading to a total ban on the production, use, stockpiling, export and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction. It is in this spirit that Cambodia was one of the first countries to sign the Ottawa Convention in 1997. Furthermore, it acceded to the Convention in June this year, and thereby became one of the States parties to the Convention, which had already entered into force. We now realize that emphasis should be placed on the full and speedy implementation of the Ottawa Convention in the worldwide context.

Over the years, we have witnessed the efforts of the international community to resolve the worldwide humanitarian crisis caused by millions of landmines. On behalf of Cambodia, my delegation wishes to express its appreciation to the United Nations and its relevant bodies and agencies, the donor countries and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations for their generous assistance and support provided to my country to date in overcoming mine problems; we owe a debt of very deep gratitude for the actions of all of those donor countries. In this connection, and in the spirit of the Maputo Declaration and the Ottawa Convention, we also call for further resource mobilization for the Voluntary Trust Fund, aimed at enhancing assistance and cooperation to mine-affected countries throughout the world, in order to rid humanity of this scourge.

My delegation also wishes to emphasize the fact that, for a country like Cambodia, which is one of the least developed countries, as long as the mine problem is our main concern, continued financial and technical assistance will remain essential to our mine clearance efforts if we are to rid ourselves of this silent and indiscriminate killer.

Mr. Alemán (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me first of all to express the gratitude of my delegation for the important report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action, document A/54/445, which gives an account of the progress achieved with regard to assistance for mine clearance as well as the current situation of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action. We also take note of the activities of the various agencies of the United Nations system and of other organizations and non-governmental organizations that are participating in this area. The report also highlights the challenges facing the international community in this field and the strategies required to overcome them. In this context, we encourage the United Nations Mine Action Service to develop its activities in other regions, especially in South America.

The entry into force of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction was an important event this year, as was the success of the First Meeting of the States Parties, held in Maputo, at which an inter-sessional working programme was set out and five informal standing committees of experts were established to facilitate the full implementation of the Convention.

My country, which participated in the Ottawa process with great interest, has responsibly shouldered its obligations as a party to this important Convention and has begun to implement it fully through the creation less than a month ago of a demining centre in Ecuador; I am very pleased to be able to announce that initiative here in this Hall. The purpose of that centre is to provide humanitarian assistance to victims, establish a better structure for demining activities, coordinate the work of the various groups in Ecuador that deal with the issue and to try to attract and make better use of international assistance.

Ecuador attaches the utmost importance to the Ottawa Convention, because we are convinced that it strengthens and improves upon the principles of international humanitarian law that are applicable to armed conflict, consolidates respect for disarmament conventions, especially those relating to controls on conventional arms that have especially harmful and indiscriminate effects, and, in particular, fosters and strengthens peace.

For Ecuador, the complete and definitive elimination of anti-personnel landmines is a priority objective, because we believe that the key goal of all demining processes is to consolidate peace among the countries affected. With this as its priority, Ecuador has been working at the domestic level for a year to ensure the successful implementation of the first phase of the demining programme, which was carried out by agreement of the Government of Peru. Here we must stress the timely and generous cooperation that we have received from various friendly Governments, such as Canada, Spain, the United States, Japan and others, to which we would once again like to express our profound gratitude.

My country has developed its human resource capacity so that, although numbers and equipment are limited, personnel are sufficiently trained to continue the demining programme effectively. However, my delegation would like to emphasize that international cooperation plays a major role in medium-term and long-term efforts to carry out all activities under the demining programme in the affected areas of our territory. During both of these stages attention must be paid to other essential factors, such as prevention and humanitarian assistance to victims.

My country is confident that, through the mechanisms of the Ottawa Convention, it will be possible to agree on ways of cooperating in this process in order to free the world from the scourge of mines by means of individual or joint contributions from Governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations that have the experience, technology and resources to deal with the problem of mines.

In order to tackle this problem seriously, it is indispensable to have mechanisms that will provide for education, coordination, carefully devised strategies, the universal application of the Ottawa Convention, the destruction of arsenals, encouragement and implementation of mine-related activities, financial assistance, technical cooperation and humanitarian care.

Finally, I should like to highlight and pay tribute to the work carried out by the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, as well as many other institutions whose efforts and dedication are proving to be very productive in the continuing campaign in favour of this lofty cause.

The President: In accordance with the decision taken by the Assembly yesterday at its 57th plenary meeting, I now call on the Observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Martino (Holy See): On 28 February 1999, the eve of the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, Pope John Paul II said:

> "Tomorrow, 1 March, the Convention which bans anti-personnel mines and orders their destruction will come into effect. For the entire community this is a goal which marks a victory of the culture of life over the culture of death. The Holy See has, right from the start, shown its adherence, signing and ratifying the Ottawa document of 4 December 1997.
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> "For the world to be free from these terrible and treacherous weapons, the path is, unfortunately,

still long. I pray God to give everyone the courage of peace, so that the countries which have not yet signed this important instrument of international law might do so without delay, and that they might continue perseveringly in the work of getting rid of mines and of rehabilitating the wounded. May people walk together in the paths of life, without fearing the hidden dangers of destruction and death."

The first step that can and must be taken by all is to stop immediately any use of landmines. The adoption of the Convention and its rapid entry into force are indicative of the moral determination not only of States but also of the peoples of the world to eliminate these insidious weapons. It is therefore an unbelievable and inhuman paradox that mines are still being laid, even in places where they had already been cleared.

The Convention obliges States parties to clear the mines laid on their territories. Only then will the many people who live in mined areas be free to carry out the activities of their daily lives without fear of injury or death and without fear for the future of their children. Many of the most severely mine-affected countries will continue to need financial help for mine clearance for many years to come. If the very purpose of the Convention is to eliminate all landmines, mine clearance must remain a priority. This obviously includes the training of local personnel and the ongoing development of effective means for mine detection and clearance that are adapted to varying local situations.

Mine clearance is also an effective step towards the integral social and economic development of afflicted countries. This broader aspect cannot be overlooked. Consequently, funding for mine clearance must become and remain an integral part of the aid and development programmes of both donor and afflicted States. This requires long-term planning and commitment, keeping in mind that the lives of people and the future well-being of entire regions are at stake.

Assistance to mine victims is another essential step along the path to a peaceful world. The humanitarian orientation of the Convention must assure that this priority remains before the public conscience. Mine victims, far too many of whom are children, have very special long-term needs which must be met with a view to their full reinsertion into society and their own contribution to the common good. But mine victims are not alone. They are also part of a larger picture: the family and society. Countries that have been torn apart by conflict are unable alone to provide for the basic health-care needs of the affected.

Assistance given by donor countries for mine clearance and for mine victims is a concrete expression of the solidarity that is the very basis of peaceful international relations.

Many other questions remain open: the production, stockpiling and trafficking of landmines, as well as their destruction. As long as mines are produced and stockpiled there is a risk that they will be used. The problem of the illegal trade in landmines is a further threat.

The goal set out in the Convention cannot be realized until that instrument becomes universal. The will of the vast majority of States and of the peoples of the world is clear in this regard. It is urgent therefore to ask those States which have not yet acceded to or ratified the Convention to weigh carefully the consequences of their delay. The Holy See would equally urge progress within the Conference on Disarmament on measures to ban the transfer of landmines.

It is clear that the need to eliminate landmines cannot be cast merely in political terms. It is a moral question that affects almost every aspect of the lives of the afflicted countries, which are often among the poorer countries. Landmines are both the seeds and the fruit of war. They also set up barriers between peoples and between States. They set back the cause of development and affect the very lives and dignity of countless people.

The Holy See will continue to attach great importance to the total elimination of landmines and to the need for ongoing help for those who have been their victims. Landmines are small weapons, but they are capable of blocking the path to true peace and development for countless peoples.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. I should like to inform members that a draft resolution under agenda item 35 will be submitted at a later date.

Agenda item 20

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/619)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/154 and Add.1)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.17/Rev.1)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/54/129/Rev.1, A/54/130/Rev.1, A/54/153, A/54/278, A/54/294, A/54/295, A/54/296, A/54/350, A/54/421, A/54/462, A/54/534)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.29)

(c) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/449)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.22)

(d) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/217)

(e) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/134)

The President: I wish to inform members that sub-item (f) of agenda item 20, entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and reconstruction of war-stricken Afghanistan" will be considered together with agenda item 50 at a later date.

Regarding draft resolutions, the Assembly has to date: under sub-item (a), draft resolution A/54/L.17/Rev.1, entitled "Emergency response to disasters"; under sub-item (b), draft resolution A/54/L.29, entitled "International assistance to and cooperation with the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America"; and under sub-item (c), draft resolution A/54/L.22, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster".

Before proceeding further, I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 6 October 1999 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the Observer of Switzerland in the debate on agenda item 20. Taking into account the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear the Observer of Switzerland on this agenda item?

It was so decided.

I now give the floor to the representative of Greece to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.17/Rev.1.

Mr. Gounaris (Greece): It is an honour for me to take the floor in order to introduce to the plenary Assembly a humanitarian resolution entitled "Emergency response to disasters", submitted jointly by the Permanent Missions of Greece and Turkey under agenda item 20 (a).

The catastrophic earthquake that struck Turkey in August mobilized Greek authorities to rush rescue teams and aid units to areas of disaster in neighbouring Turkey, offering their contribution to saving human lives. Upon receiving the news of the strongly felt earthquake in the north of Athens one month later, Turkish authorities immediately dispatched specially trained rescue teams to the stricken areas. The immense need for emergency humanitarian assistance prompted similar, unified reactions in both countries.

The spontaneous acts of fraternity and solidarity between members of the Greek and Turkish rescue teams, sifting through the rubble of buildings destroyed by the earthquakes, motivated our two Ministers for Foreign Affairs to propose and offer to the world community an effective disaster response capability. The decision of the Turkish and Greek Governments, reflected in this draft resolution, to establish a joint Standby Disaster Response Unit comprising contingents drawn from governmental and non-governmental organizations and agencies of both countries in order to reinforce and expand existing arrangements of the United Nations system bears no financial implications for the programme budget of the United Nations. This joint Standby Disaster Response Unit is ready to offer its services under the auspices of the Secretary-General in any part of the world, whenever needed.

In this context, I would like to thank the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat as well as the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Vieira de Mello, for their support of this joint initiative aimed at enhancing existing modalities within the United Nations system.

This draft resolution has met with wide and unprecedented support from the United Nations community. This initiative has been widely welcomed as fully complying with and promoting the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Thanks to the support of all Permanent Missions, this is the first humanitarian draft resolution to be concluded and submitted this month for adoption by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. To date, 103 Member States have become sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.17/Rev.1., and I have been informed today that Belarus has also expressed a wish to co-sponsor the draft resolution.

On behalf of my Government, I would like to express our deepest appreciation and thanks to all the sponsors for their support.

On 13 October 1999, the United Nations observed the annual International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, a culminating point of the 1999 World Disaster Reduction Campaign, which was a highlight of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The annual theme was "Prevention pays", with special emphasis on seismic risk reduction.

This year, as underlined in the relevant report of the Secretary-General, natural disasters of an unprecedented scale affected many parts of the world. Rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, climate change and the depletion of natural resources are among the factors contributing to the increased vulnerability of communities all over the world to natural disasters.

During 1999, Latin America, the Caribbean, Turkey, Greece, Mexico and Taiwan suffered the loss of thousands of human lives. Turkey, unfortunately, just a few days ago, was struck for a second time by an earthquake. Greek search-and-rescue workers, medical provisions and mobile medical units, responding to an urgent call from the Turkish authorities, were among the first to arrive — in Bolu, last Saturday — after a new, devastating earthquake hit our neighbouring country. The same day, immediately after the earthquake struck, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mr. Ismail Cem, spoke on the phone with his Greek counterpart, Mr. George Papandreou. I would like to take this opportunity to express once more Greece's deepest concern about and solidarity with the victims of the earthquake in Turkey.

I hope that this draft resolution, representing a modest contribution by Greece and Turkey to the United Nations efforts for natural disaster reduction, will be adopted today by consensus.

The President: I now call on the representative of Turkey, also to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.17/Rev.1.

Mr. Göktürk (Turkey): As we approach the end of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, it is tragic that there has been a dramatic increase in the number, effects and costs of natural calamities. Global figures tell us that disasters have claimed an increasing number of human lives and have cost the world an average of $87 billion each year during the last decade. The cost of disasters in the 1990s was nine times as high as in the 1960s.

The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction has helped put the issue of the prevention and mitigation of disasters on national and political agendas. Turkey itself and the world at large have learned much in recent years, generally the hard way, about disaster mitigation. One of the most important lessons we have learned from dealing with the
effects of recent earthquakes is that coordination between all actors is essential.

The Secretary-General, in his annual report on the work of the Organization, describes 1998 as the worst year on record for weather-related natural disasters. I presume 1999 will be recorded in the annals of history as a year distinctly characterized by a string of earthquakes along the fault lines of our globe — earthquakes almost unprecedented in their magnitude and frequency. My country, for one, within a three-month period sustained blow after blow because of the unstable crust on which it sits.

Impending disasters must be treated as the modern sword of Damocles, requiring us to be disaster-conscious, vigilant and ready to respond.

In the aftermath of the massive earthquake in Turkey last August, and the one that occurred a month later in Greece, the prompt mobilization of rescue teams and aid units by the two countries in each other's hour of need inspired the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Turkey and Greece — Mr. Cem and Mr. Papandreou — to offer the world community an effective disaster response capability. The Governments of Greece and Turkey have therefore decided to establish a Standby Disaster Response Unit, comprising contingents from governmental and non-governmental agencies of both countries, to reinforce and expand existing standby arrangements of the United Nations system. The draft resolution before the Assembly, entitled "Emergency response to disasters" is the result of this inspiration of the two nations.

We are grateful to the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions, and countries and other organizations that rushed to our aid. We therefore feel well placed to appreciate the importance of the United Nations disaster reduction capabilities. The United Nations must continue to offer both organizational and material support to Member States, given the fact that natural disasters keep claiming lives and destroying property in all corners of the world.

In this connection, I would also like to express our appreciation for having received overwhelming support for the Greek-Turkish draft resolution on cooperation in establishing a joint emergency response capability. The impressive number of sponsors testifies to this support. I am also pleased to announce at this point that the delegations of Israel and Georgia have also joined the list of sponsors.

We are convinced that the Assembly will adopt the draft resolution with the enthusiasm it deserves. Turkey, hand in hand with the international community, will continue to be actively involved in furthering the United Nations humanitarian causes.

Lastly, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Permanent Representative of Greece for the kind words he addressed to my nation.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Belarus to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.22.

Mr. Sychov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The depth and scope of the drastic consequences of the disaster that took place on 26 April 1986 at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant made Chernobyl a global problem. The numerous casualties, the considerable economic damage in the contaminated areas, which were as large as the territory of a medium-sized country, and the poorly studied and often unpredictable health effects of the radiation urgently called for international cooperation in addressing those consequences.

Unfortunately, the dynamics of the situation in the affected regions provides little ground for optimism. Although the most critical stage in the Chernobyl mitigation activities is already behind us, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine continue to have serious concerns about the enduring effects of radiation on people's lives and health.

I take this opportunity to cite several facts concerning Belarus. The rate of thyroid cancer among children and young people in the affected regions has risen 40- to 60-fold and, in individual population centres, even by a factor of 300. However, according to the assessments of medical experts, the highest rate of illness is yet to come.

In recent years, in the areas affected by radioactive contamination, there have been serious negative changes in the demographic situation that indicate a social and economic decline in many regions. This has necessitated the adoption of a range of appropriate measures, to the implementation of which our country annually allocates a significant share of the state budget. Currently, the allocation amounts to some 10 per cent of the gross domestic product.

In recent years, it has been possible to relocate people from the contaminated regions to safer areas, to conduct professional medical examination of victims and to ensure their treatment, including the treatment and improvement of the health of children and young people.

Valuable assistance has been rendered towards rehabilitating the agricultural and industrial infrastructure of the affected regions and towards ensuring radiation protection of the population locally and elsewhere.

However, our country cannot solve the entire range of post-Chernobyl problems on its own. Belarus's need for resources to overcome the consequences of the disaster significantly exceeds its financial and technological capacities.

Our country highly appreciates the United Nations catalyzing and coordinating role in the development of international cooperation on Chernobyl. We are grateful to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the preparation of the upgraded 1999 United Nations Appeal for International Cooperation on Chernobyl. We are also very grateful for the working visit in October of Under-Secretary-General Sergio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl, to the irradiated areas of Belarus. A meeting of the Quadripartite Committee for Coordination on Chernobyl was held on 18 November in New York under the auspices of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We sincerely hope that this meeting will allow us to find new means and mechanisms for mobilizing the resources and efforts of the international community to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

Our delegation notes with special appreciation the work of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations Children's Fund and many other international intergovernmental organizations to provide humanitarian and technical assistance to the affected population of the Republic of Belarus. Given the lack of financial resources, these organizations have made great efforts to implement priority programmes and projects in Belarus. Our delegation also notes with satisfaction that, as result of the joint efforts of the representatives of the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus, together with the United Nations Department of Public Information and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations website is posting updates on the post-Chernobyl situation.

In the context of the further activation of international efforts, the consistent, scientifically based planning and implementation of the United Nations programme of activities for Chernobyl are of the greatest importance. We are grateful to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for developing the Inter-Agency Programme of International Assistance to Areas Affected by the Chernobyl Disaster. At the same time, we are seriously concerned that, because of the lack of means, the implementation of this Programme has been indefinitely postponed. At a time when other United Nations humanitarian programmes are being financed at an average rate of 80 per cent, the United Nations has collected no more than 2 per cent for the implementation of international Chernobyl-related projects. It would appear that the difficulties in implementing the aforementioned Programme are connected to a lack of clear understanding by donor countries of two major aspects of the Chernobyl problem. There is a need to distinguish issues of rendering assistance to the populations of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia affected by the disaster from the problem of ensuring radioactive security for the working remnant of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, including the problem of a sarcophagus over its fourth reactor. We are convinced that post-Chernobyl international cooperation must be carried out in a balanced manner and be based on universal human values and the principles of partnership. It should also be aimed at the implementation of fundamental human rights, including the right to life.

We must not allow the Inter-Agency Programme to suffer the fate of the United Nations Joint Plan of international cooperation to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, which was drawn up but never implemented. Moreover, we believe that the successful implementation of the Inter-Agency Programme would undoubtedly further strengthen the international authority of the United Nations. The convening as soon as possible of a special international meeting on financial support for international Chernobyl-related projects could help solve these problems.

We are convinced that the United Nations can and should play a special role in preparing such a meeting. The forthcoming fifteenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster could be the logical moment to convene such an international forum. By that date, it should be possible to undertake other major activities to promote further international cooperation to resolve post-Chernobyl problems. These could include the convening under United Nations auspices of an international symposium on the entire range of problems in cooperation on Chernobyl; analytical interviews, to include appraisals of the current situation and its prospects, of high-ranking

officials of the United Nations and organizations of the system by leading members of the mass media; the annual holding by the United Nations Secretariat on 26 April, the day commemorating the victims of the Chernobyl disaster, of thematic events dedicated to international cooperation on assistance to the Governments affected.

Taking into account the complexity and scale of the problems connected to the Chernobyl disaster, the delegation of the Republic of Belarus has the honour to introduce, on behalf of the States sponsors, the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.22, entitled "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster". I wish to note that, since the initial publication of the draft resolution, China, Georgia, India, Latvia and Lithuania have become sponsors. The sponsors have tried to elaborate and submit for consideration by the General Assembly a comprehensive text that reflects in a balanced manner all the key aspects of the Chernobyl problem and is based on an appraisal of the development of international cooperation in this field in recent years. We hope that, as in previous years, the General Assembly will adopt this draft resolution by consensus.

The President: I call on the representative of Nicaragua to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.29.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, we wish through you, Sir, to thank the Secretary-General for his reports contained in documents A/54/350, entitled "International assistance to and cooperation with the Alliance for Sustainable Development of Central America", and A/54/130/Rev.1, entitled "Collaborative efforts to assist Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama and progress made with the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts of the affected countries". These draft resolutions reflect the situation in Central America over the past two years with regard to the progress of and obstacles to the efforts of the peoples and Governments of the region with respect to international cooperation to achieve the objectives of the Alliance for Sustainable Development and to consolidate peace, freedom and democracy in the region.

Mr. Hasan (Iraq), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In the period that has elapsed since this item was last considered, since the fifty-second session of the General Assembly in 1997 until now, important events have occurred in the Central American region which have been the subject of attention of the international community because of their impact on the process of peace-building, democracy and sustainable development.

Having overcome this stage of confrontation and armed conflicts in Central America, and in compliance with the Esquipulas II Agreements and its supplement, the special economic cooperation plan for Central America, whose purpose was to help overcome the structural problems which led to the crisis, the peoples and Governments of the region, with the support of the United Nations system and the donor community, including international financial bodies, as well as the international community as a whole, have taken action in order to establish and implement a new regional development programme called the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America, on the basis of previously established priorities in the political, social and ecological spheres whose resolution is vital to achieve more just and equitable societies and to avoid causes of tension and conflict.

As other speakers have stated at this General Assembly, the Central American countries have made substantive progress in the areas of politics, democratization, respect for human rights and improvement in the standard of living of their peoples. However, we must acknowledge that with regard to sustainable development, we face an enormous challenge and a great responsibility so that our societies, particularly the more vulnerable sectors, can live in a more dignified and just environment, free of poverty. As in any other process, progress in Central America has been threatened by the consequences of armed conflict, particularly the escalation of acts of violence and criminal activity which brings to mind the existence of a real crisis with regard to public safety, as well as by limitations and obstacles to overcoming structural problems.

In addition to this situation, there has been the destruction and the subsequent effects caused by hurricane Mitch in 1998, the worst natural disaster of that region during this century. It caused the loss of a great number of lives, harm to the economy, to business, to the environment and to the infrastructure of the countries of the region and caused the diversion of resources to overcome the situation. This has led to a greater deterioration in the serious socio-economic situation of Central American countries, particularly in Honduras and Nicaragua.

Allow me to pause to reaffirm our deepest appreciation to the international community, particularly the friendly countries, to the donor community, to the organs of the United Nations system and to international financial organs for their prompt response to the appeals of Central American Governments requesting emergency assistance and for providing assistance in developing a rehabilitation and reconstruction programme.

We the Central Americans are aware of our weaknesses and our limitations, but as we are the parties directly responsible we face these complex problems as seriously as possible. For this we are developing our best efforts with individuals and groups of civil society to ensure their participation in the decisions that affect their future and that promote economic growth and sustainable development of the region. Therefore we hope to continue to have the solidarity and the support of the United Nations system, as well as of international financial organizations and the donor community, especially those that pledged their commitment in the Stockholm Declaration, as their invaluable assistance is vital in order to overcome the structural problems underlying the effects of natural disasters.

Allow me, on behalf of the cosponsors, to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.29 under agenda item 20. In the first preambular paragraph there is mention of the various resolutions adopted earlier by the General Assembly on this item. Later on the important progress made in the region is acknowledged, as are the importance and effectiveness of the commitments reached at the presidential summits, whose purpose was the promotion of the objectives of peace, stability and sustainable human development.

Reference is made to the disasters caused by hurricane Mitch and to the vulnerability of the countries of the region, as well as to the efforts of solidarity and support of the international community, in particular the Stockholm Declaration, to overcome the effects of natural disasters.

Note is taken of the efforts made by the region itself through the adoption of the Quinquennium for the Reduction of Vulnerability to and the Impact of Natural Disasters in Central America and of the consent for the strategic framework for the reduction of vulnerability to and the impact of natural disasters in Central America, given by the Presidents of the region in the Guatemala Declaration of 19 October 1999.

The effective contribution of the organisms of the United Nations system and other international organisms is recognized, as is that of non-governmental organizations, the importance of political dialogue between the European Union and Central America and the initiatives of the Group of Three and the Group of Twenty-four in carrying out the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America.

In the operative part, the draft resolution takes note with satisfaction of the reports of the Secretary-General. The importance of supporting the efforts of Central American countries is emphasized in implementing the strategic framework for the reduction of vulnerability to and the impact of natural disasters in Central America. The importance of cooperation and international economic, financial and technical assistance is highlighted.

The draft resolution recognizes the importance of studies carried out by the United Nations Development Programme and other associated groups in preparation for the forthcoming meeting of the Consultative Group of the World Bank on the regional aspects of the reconstruction and transformation of Central America, to be hosted by the Spanish Government in the year 2000 in Madrid, which seeks to establish new relations of cooperation in the objectives of the Alliance for the Sustainable Development of Central America.

The consolidation of the Meso American Biological Corridor is also highlighted, and the decision of the Central American Governments to focus their efforts on the implementation of programmes with strategies to achieve sustainable human development in previously determined priority areas is supported.

As consultations are still being held, it would be appreciated if action on this item were not taken today.

Mr. Kahiluoto (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union on agenda item 20. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area, Liechtenstein — align themselves with this statement.

Let me, first and foremost, register our deep concern at the continued occurrence of armed conflicts and natural disasters and the human suffering which these

crises continue to cause. We would like to express our sympathy for the victims of these crises, most of which have struck developing countries and have added considerably to the existing social and economic difficulties. We reaffirm our commitment to help alleviate such suffering and to assist in the recovery and rehabilitation of these societies, while at the same time urging Governments and other parties involved in armed conflict to make every possible effort to end the violence.

The European Union attaches great importance to the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council, where issues of the coordination of humanitarian assistance can be addressed in a comprehensive manner. We welcome the outcome of the second humanitarian segment and appreciate the work done by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to translate the agreed conclusions into operational guidelines. Bearing in mind the emphasis in the agreed conclusions on measures to ensure a smooth transition from relief to development, it should be ensured that all humanitarian, as well as development, actors are engaged in the implementation of these conclusions. It is equally important that Governments fulfil the commitments undertaken in the agreed conclusions. The European Union is prepared to work closely with other Member States and the Secretariat to ensure that the conclusions are fully implemented.

This year, as we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions and the one hundredth anniversary of the Hague Conventions, armed conflicts in many parts of the world, including the Great Lakes region, Angola, Sierra Leone, East Timor, the Balkans and Caucasia, have given rise to frequent and flagrant violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Civilians have become deliberate targets of combatants in a world where internal conflicts have become increasingly prevalent. The two open debates held in the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and Security Council resolution 1265 (1999) on this subject have been important steps in highlighting the issue and the need for political will and action in the search for solutions to complement humanitarian efforts in complex emergencies.

The European Union would like to welcome the efforts of the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to further improve their joint planning for enhancing humanitarian response in order to create an environment which is more secure for humanitarian action. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the initiative to develop principles of engagement and ground rules in humanitarian operations for Governments, non-State actors and humanitarian organizations; the efforts to create humanitarian space and days of tranquillity to facilitate the distribution of aid to needy populations; and advocacy with the Security Council. Important strides have been made in highlighting the critical importance of access by humanitarian personnel to civilians, and we urge all Governments and other parties to respect the non-political, impartial and neutral nature of humanitarian work.

In his annual report on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General called for a transition from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention. In many cases, human rights violations are a major cause of armed conflict. We thus welcome the efforts by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to give further attention to the relationship between humanitarian action and human rights, notably the establishment of the reference group on humanitarian action and human rights. The recent OCHA publication on guidelines on international humanitarian law and human rights law for humanitarian coordinators is to be welcomed, as is the finalization by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights of a basic manual on human rights for United Nations field personnel, and the development by the United Nations Children's Fund of best field practices in emergency situations.

The European Union regards these developments as a useful and practical mechanism by which to give effect to the Secretary-General's programme of reform, which recognized the need to integrate human rights into the broad range of the Organization's activities. The programme of reform further recognized the need to bring together political, humanitarian, development and human rights actors. In this context, we acknowledge the role of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs in enhancing interaction and complementarity on issues that have strong security, peacekeeping, and political implications.

The European Union would like to express deep concern at the increasing number of threats and attacks on humanitarian personnel in the field. This seriously hinders the ability and effectiveness of the Organization in providing protection and assistance to civilians. Without safe and secure access for humanitarian personnel, the suffering of civilians and vulnerable populations can only increase. We would like to stress

the responsibility under international law of Governments and parties to conflicts to ensure safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel to populations at risk.

The European Union welcomes the recognition in recent months by the Secretary-General and the Security Council of the need for urgent measures to enhance the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. Following the recent murders of staff members in Somalia and Pristina, the assassination of two officials in Burundi and the taking of hostages in Georgia, in early November 1999 the Administrative Committee on Coordination adopted a decision calling for a comprehensive approach to security matters and listing a number of recommendations.

It is of paramount importance that the General Assembly add its voice to these calls. With this in mind, the European Union is again this year sponsoring a draft resolution on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and the protection of United Nations personnel. We hope that the negotiations will result in a strong text reflecting the sense of urgency with regard to measures needed to enhance the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

A major concern is that the response to various incidents by the host Governments to various incidents has often been inadequate. The United Nations must insist that concerned Governments conduct vigorous investigations into all security incidents involving United Nations-system personnel. The European Union considers it vital that those who incite and perpetrate acts against humanitarian personnel be held accountable both by Governments and by the international community. We welcome the entry into force of the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, as well as the designation of attacks against humanitarian or peacekeeping personnel as war crimes by the Statute of the International Criminal Court. The implementation of the 1994 Convention should be strengthened through increasing the number of ratifications. In this respect, expanding the scope of the Convention, *inter alia*, to locally recruited staff merits serious consideration.

While in the recent past the United Nations has taken a number of steps to enhance the security and safety of United Nations-system personnel, such efforts need to be intensified. We acknowledge that in part, the limited availability of resources for enhancing the security arrangements sets restrictions on those endeavours. In this respect, we recognize the need to strengthen the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator in order to enable the system to respond adequately to all security incidents. Greater involvement of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the humanitarian agencies involved in field operations would also be beneficial.

We welcome the addendum on safety and security to the Secretary-General's report on this agenda item, although we would have preferred a full report on this important issue. We therefore hope that by May 2000 the Secretary-General will issue a comprehensive report to the General Assembly to facilitate a timely response to the need to enhance the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

Natural disasters have affected many parts of the world on an unprecedented scale. One of the most powerful earthquakes of this century struck the north-west region of Turkey in August this year, followed by another in the north of Athens. Last week we received distressing news of yet another earthquake in Turkey. The European Union welcomes the joint initiative of those two countries to make available a Standby Disaster Response Unit to reinforce the existing capacities of the United Nations system to respond to emergencies in a timely manner.

The Secretary-General's annual report on the work of the Organization highlights some alarming trends. Ninety percent of the victims of natural disasters live in developing countries, where poverty and population pressures force growing numbers of people to live in disaster-prone areas. The report also notes that today's disasters are sometimes man-made, and human action or inaction exacerbates virtually all of them.

Natural disasters need to be addressed in a comprehensive way, with emphasis on pre-disaster measures, early warning and prevention. It is equally important to adopt a holistic approach to disaster response, whereby the needs of recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation are addressed at the early stages of an emergency. Disaster reduction components need to be integrated into the recovery process and future development planning. The European Union welcomes the efforts by the United Nations system to improve disaster preparedness through strengthening the response mechanisms and supporting national Governments of disaster-prone countries. The early deployment of United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams in many disaster areas has proved to be essential.

Although the donor response to natural disasters increased by 300 per cent between 1997 and 1998, the European Union acknowledges the need for immediate availability of resources for life-saving and life-sustaining assistance to survivors of natural disasters.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, and the staff of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their remarkable work during the first years of the existence of the Office, and to welcome Ms. Carolyn McAskie, Acting Emergency Relief Coordinator. I would also like to commend the work done by the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to enhance coordination at the field level and to formulate harmonized policy. The broad composition of the Committee, comprising not only United Nations agencies with humanitarian mandates, but also the Red Cross Movement, the World Bank and three non-governmental organization consortia is a key to ensuring a coherent response to emergencies.

Effective coordination at the field level between all actors is a major challenge. The European Union welcomes the strategic framework concept, which seeks to ensure a coherent response to complex emergencies by addressing relief, political and development aspects in an integrated manner and by enhancing complementarities and synergies between the various actors. Protection of civilians and humanitarian workers should be key elements of such frameworks.

So far, the strategic framework concept has been applied only in Afghanistan. The European Union welcomes the announcement on the launching of a strategic framework for Sierra Leone and believes that the framework should be implemented as a matter of urgency. The European Union encourages the further development of the strategic framework concept and its application in other cases of complex emergencies. In this context, principled programming should be applied to guarantee consistency, as well as to ensure that these principles are respected.

Cooperation between the various coordinators at the field level is also of vital importance. The United Nations system alone may involve triple coordination in a single country: one humanitarian coordinator, one resident coordinator and one political special representative of the Secretary-General. Each coordinator must share a common understanding of the goals of the United Nations operations in that country and conform to his or her role with regard to other coordinators so that the best possible synergy can be obtained.

The consolidated appeals process has proved to be crucial for inter-agency coordination, as well as for donor response. An important function of the consolidated appeals is that, together with the advocacy efforts made by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, they remind the donor community of the so-called forgotten crises. The European Union welcomes the initiative to designate 23 November as "world humanitarian day", during which the consolidated appeals will be officially introduced.

While the donor response to the appeals made by the OCHA has improved, the European Union remains concerned at the insufficient level of funding received by OCHA from the regular budget, in particular the uneven balance between regular budget posts and those funded from extra-budgetary sources. The Union therefore welcomes the measures set out in the proposed regular budget for the biennium 2000-2001 to improve this balance.

The provision of humanitarian assistance is a priority commitment for the European Union, which already contributes the largest share of humanitarian assistance, both bilaterally and multilaterally. We have for a long time been an active partner of humanitarian and other international organizations that lead the work in crisis areas. We shall continue to assist in every way possible the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies, and we continue to look for ways that our own performance and interaction with operative organizations can be further improved.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): As we stand at the doorstep of the third millennium, it is appropriate for the Assembly to reflect on how the international community can most effectively provide humanitarian assistance. Humanity is a value shared by all the peoples of the world, whatever their history or cultural heritage. This year we observed the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, which were formulated to ensure that even in the course of armed conflict, humankind would adhere to certain laws based upon humanity. But as this century tarnished with conflict from one end to the other draws to a close, the daily toll of death and suffering shames us into further deliberation on the subject.

One cannot underestimate the relevance of humanitarian activities, not only for facilitating the resolution of conflicts, but also for achieving post-conflict

stability and reconstruction. The question of what actions should be taken by the international community with regard to humanity was a key focus of the address by the Secretary-General at the beginning of this session of the General Assembly. In this connection, effective coordination among the various efforts in humanitarian assistance is of vital importance, as was most recently confirmed to the world by the situation in East Timor.

What I would like to stress here is that humanitarian assistance is not simply limited to a passive response to an emergency. We have to be vigilant and think strategically in formulating policy on effective humanitarian assistance. It is more important than ever that this policy be carried out on the basis of the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. And, through recent endeavours on the humanitarian front, some more specific lessons have been learned, among them the following.

First, civilians are increasingly becoming involved in conflicts. This has been the subject of discussions in both the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. Civilians are recruited as soldiers even as children and are targeted for attacks and displaced from their homes. Refugees, in the traditional sense of the word, are now outnumbered by the sum of other categories of displaced persons, including internally displaced persons. And we are forced to acknowledge, with a growing sense of outrage, that more humanitarian workers are being victimized than ever before.

Secondly, in terms of resources provided, there is an imbalance between headline emergencies and less eye-catching but equally grave crises. The solidarity shown by the international community in assisting the process of constructing East Timor is, we feel, to be highly commended. Japan is co-sponsoring a draft resolution on humanitarian assistance to East Timor in the hope that partners from all regions will join us in extending substantial support in the coming years.

Often, as in the case of a number of conflicts in Africa, regional initiatives for peace and development — particularly those that address the root causes of war — should be pursued. An expression in the Secretary-General's address preceding the general debate at this session is insightful: "Humanity, after all, is indivisible." (*A/54/PV.4, p. 3*)

Thirdly, it is important to bear in mind that violence recurs in a vicious circle with poverty. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Ogata, said in her recent address to the Third Committee,

> "the Kosovo crisis is not over, [and] some of the experiences of Kosovo can provide useful models to tackle other situations in which the gap between humanitarian and reconstruction activities is very wide".

Again, in the Secretary-General's words,

> "[t]he aftermath of war requires no less skill, no less sacrifice and no fewer resources in order to forge a lasting peace and avoid a return to violence." (*A/54/PV.4, pp. 3-4*)

In various aspects of humanitarian assistance, some positive steps have been taken in the past year.

First, debates are under way on means of strengthening legal protection for civilians. The common recognition that led mankind to draft the Geneva Conventions 50 years ago was that even war must have limits. The question now is how to stop the culture of impunity; non-State perpetrators of serious crimes have to be tried and punished. The establishment of the International Criminal Court is a major step towards that end and towards enhancing the accountability of parties to a conflict. Japan has been active in establishing and will continue to be active in effectuating the Court.

Secondly, the protection of humanitarian personnel is a burning issue on which we need to take immediate action. All those Member States that have not yet done so are urged to ratify the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. Japan supports the Secretary-General's recommendation that the General Assembly pursue the development of a protocol to the Convention that would extend the scope of legal protection to all United Nations and associated personnel. Japan also appreciates the efforts made by the United Nations Security Coordinator in this area. Japan is happy to note that the training project funded from the $1 million it extended to the Trust Fund for Security was carried out successfully.

In the Economic and Social Council last July, Ms. Bertini of the World Food Programme suggested that the Secretary-General be asked to submit a report listing all incidents in which United Nations humanitarian workers have been killed, along with the background and circumstances of each incident and the actions taken by

the relevant authorities and the United Nations in response. Japan fully supports her proposal and hopes that all Member States will recognize the seriousness of the need to take effective measures to ensure accountability and prevent any recurrence of such incidents.

Thirdly, on the issue of the gap between relief and development assistance, it is encouraging to note that the Brookings process is inducing greater awareness of the problem and promoting planning for concrete action. Japan also is pleased that the World Bank is advancing a post-conflict agenda and working more intensively with partners, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, on plans for activities in places such as Sierra Leone and Kosovo. A comprehensive approach is required to fill the gap. This approach must include such factors as protection of human rights, security, demobilization and good governance. How to bring about effective reconciliation among formerly warring parties is definitely one of the major tasks facing the world at this juncture.

Japan welcomes the agreed conclusion of the second humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council. This conclusion seeks ways to effectively deal with the gap between relief and development in post-conflict situations and in the aftermath of natural disasters. Japan commends the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for launching consolidated appeals for all complex emergencies so that donors are in a better position to respond to them. The "international humanitarian day" to be observed next week in Geneva is an excellent idea that demonstrates that OCHA is fulfilling its mandate of advocacy. It would be useful if more assessed contributions were allocated to OCHA's activities.

As was dealt with in our deliberations in the Economic and Social Council last summer, humanitarian assistance in the context of natural disasters deserves equal attention. Japan has been active in providing assistance to countries all over the world that have been devastated by hurricanes, earthquakes and floods in the past year.

I should like to take this opportunity to express my sincere condolences to all those who lost family members and friends in such disasters, including the recent one in Turkey. While natural hazards cannot be prevented, their damage can be mitigated and preventive measures are therefore important. To that end, policies must be promoted that encourage the development of structures that equip society to protect itself against natural hazards. Again, there must be ample coordination among international agencies with mandates in this area, for example, in following up effectively on the International Decade for National Disaster Reduction.

I should like before I conclude to refer to a success story within the continuing narrative of our deliberations on humanitarian assistance under this agenda item. Last year, in this Assembly, to promote an effective international response to the resolution on the rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan, Japan expressed its readiness to host a conference with UNDP in cooperation with the Government of Kazakhstan and other relevant United Nations bodies. The conference was successfully held in Tokyo in September this year and generated pledges of more than $20 million. This is an excellent example of how support can be generated through the United Nations for cooperation among countries responding to a humanitarian problem.

In conclusion, let me touch upon the question of human security as a main focus of Japan's foreign policy. By human security we mean ensuring the safety and survival of individual human beings and the protection of their dignity. The world can count on Japan to extend humanitarian assistance, both bilaterally and through the United Nations and other organizations, in the form of financial, technical and human resources cooperation, bearing in mind the goal of enhancing human security. Japan is determined to continue engaging in the international endeavours for a better millennium for mankind

Mr. Lee See-young (Republic of Korea) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to begin by expressing my delegation's deep appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations". This report faithfully reflects the ongoing efforts of the international community, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, to improve United Nations humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. In particular, my delegation appreciates the activities initiated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, under the leadership of Mr. Vieira de Mello, the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Following the end of the cold war, new perils have emerged. Refugee crises and humanitarian emergencies have erupted at a relentless pace. Throughout the world, internal and intraregional conflicts are threatening civilian

populations as never before. Particularly tragic is the targeting in armed conflict of the most vulnerable members of our society: children, women and the disadvantaged. On the threshold of the new millennium, the international community should no longer tolerate such developments and should take immediate and resolute steps to prevent such humanitarian tragedies, particularly violations of international humanitarian principles.

In recent years, the United Nations has faced tremendous challenges, including a spate of natural disasters and conflict-related emergencies and outbreaks of disease. These challenges have clearly revealed both the strengths and relative weaknesses of the Organization.

In our view, one of the ways to improve humanitarian and disaster-relief assistance lies in better coordination. It has been our long-standing practice to divide relief efforts by time-frame — long-term and short-term — as well as by function, institution, logistics and even financing. While this may appear logical on paper, it has become increasingly clear that relief efforts cannot be so neatly separated into distinct categories. Phases and functions often overlap, requiring an approach that is at once integrated and comprehensive. This overlap is not coincidental, but due rather to necessities dictated by realities on the ground. Based on this valuable experience, it follows that short-term relief assistance and long-term development aid should be combined from the start.

In our discussion of how to strengthen coordination, my delegation wishes to put forward the following points. First, to better exploit the limited resources available, there should be close collaboration between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the other development agencies. Also, the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) should be further developed as the main tool for mobilizing resources. In this context, we welcome the launching of the joint CAP by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Secondly, to achieve better coordination in the field, the respective roles of the Humanitarian Assistance Coordinators and of the Resident Coordinators is of the utmost importance. Making their selection process more transparent will make it possible to expand recruitment among all United Nations agencies. My delegation welcomes the joint consultation involving Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Assistance Coordinators that took place in Geneva in December 1998. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme should therefore be encouraged to provide more opportunities in the future to share their experiences.

Thirdly, in the context of the United Nations reform programme, the United Nations Development Programme now has the authority and the mandate to take all measures necessary in response to natural disasters. As a result, there is increasing demand for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Development Programme to bolster their cooperation and coordination in responding to natural disasters.

Fourthly, the history of the Republic of Korea over the past 50 years has taught us that emergency assistance and long-term development are inextricably linked. Those who deal with short-term assistance must coordinate their efforts closely with those handling long-term development. Certainly, considerable progress has already been made within the United Nations on developing a more holistic and strategic approach to responding to natural disasters and complex emergencies. For this success to be sustained, however, it is imperative that member countries garner sufficient political will based on heightened international and national awareness of humanitarian principles.

In complex humanitarian emergencies, victims must have unfettered access to humanitarian assistance. The first step is to allow humanitarian aid workers to carry out their urgent tasks effectively and, above all, safely. In our view, this Assembly should carry out substantive discussions on the protection of humanitarian assistance, including the establishment of a mechanism to extend the scope of legal protection under the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

Aid workers have increasingly found themselves the target of attacks as they try courageously to alleviate suffering in conflicts that rage out of control. 1998 marked the first year in history in which more civilians than peacekeepers lost their lives in service to the United Nations. The massacre of two United Nations officials in southern Burundi and of one official of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo remind us that this trend shows no sign of abating in the near future.

In this connection, the Republic of Korea, during its presidency of the Security Council in May 1997, initiated a debate on protection for humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations. We are pleased to note that the Security Council has pursued this policy

of holding open debates on the issue. We welcome the Secretary-General's annual report on the work of the Organization, with its central themes of facing the humanitarian challenge and building a culture of prevention.

In response to the urgent need to protect those involved in humanitarian assistance in conflict situations, and determined to contribute to international efforts in this regard, my Government has decided to co-sponsor the draft resolution before us on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel. We hope that this draft resolution will be adopted by consensus by the General Assembly.

In conclusion, I would like to assure the General Assembly of the steadfast support and commitment of the Government of Korea to the relief assistance and protection work of the United Nations and of our resolve to continue contributing to this collective endeavour.

Mr. Frigerio (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak before the General Assembly on behalf of my Government on the occasion of the consideration of sub-item (d) of agenda item 20. My delegation expresses its gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report in document A/54/217 on the "White Helmets" Initiative, which is the focus of the General Assembly's debate on this sub-item.

I also wish to express our appreciation for the continued and committed support given to this initiative by the United Nations Volunteers from Bonn and Geneva and by the United Nations Development Programme office in Buenos Aires. Finally, we are honour-bound to acknowledge the invaluable guidance provided to us at all times by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in New York and Geneva. This close relationship with OCHA portends very well for future joint activities.

As indicated in the Secretary-General's report, a few months ago United Nations Volunteers and Argentina agreed on the need for an independent and in-depth evaluation of the experience of the "White Helmets" initiative from its inception to date. The highly positive results of that evaluation were used by the Secretariat, *inter alia*, in drafting document A/54/217. Parts II, III and IV of the report are sufficiently self-explanatory so as to make it unnecessary for me to refer to them extensively. I wish to state clearly that we are in full agreement with their content, just as we have previously agreed with the findings and recommendations of the assessment mission.

It is because of the confidence gained through solid experience, confirmed through an independent assessment and reaffirmed through the expansion of institutional agreements and contacts with the World Food Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Organization of American States, the Inter-American Development Bank, the European Parliament, the Organization of African Unity and the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations that I am able to state my full agreement with the views of the Secretary-General expressed in the report. Pre-identified, standby and trained teams of White Helmets are a tool available to the United Nations, through the United Nations Volunteers, to give immediate support to its relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development activities.

In this context, my Government, together with other countries, will submit a draft resolution on the "White Helmets" initiative for consideration by the General Assembly. This is a unique opportunity for my Government to reaffirm its commitment to this initiative and to express its conviction that it continues to deserve the ongoing support of all the members of the international community.

As pointed out by the Secretary-General on more than one occasion, including during his recent visit to my country, the active participation of civil society in United Nations activities is an essential prerequisite for the success of the pre- and post-disaster and pre- and post-conflict humanitarian missions. The availability of the White Helmet volunteer corps is a useful, effective and efficient tool to ensure orderly and increasing participation.

The draft resolution to be introduced contains the necessary elements to contribute to this task, assigning to the Member States, through the strengthening and expansion of an appropriate consultative mechanism, the crucial responsibility of ensuring the necessary political guidance that this additional tool of international cooperation requires. The interest shown by many Member States and sectors of civil society in the concept and composition of the White Helmets, as well as the possible emergence of similar mechanisms in other countries seeking to identify themselves as White Helmets, should lead the Secretariat to consider that the

implementation of those initiatives must respond adequately to the General Assembly's requirements.

I would not wish to conclude without expressing my Government's concern, and my own, for ensuring the safety and security of the volunteers in the field. It is unfortunate to think that those men and women who volunteer their hearts, bodies and minds to restore the well-being of a population should be the target of senseless violence. It is not enough to express our sympathy for the plight of these volunteers; it is our responsibility to clearly express our repudiation of that violence and to take the necessary precautions to avoid its repetition.

Mr. Baali (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): At the end of this century that has seen man firmly take control, open up new frontiers and assert his mastery over nature through scientific and technological progress, our planet finds itself at the same time swept into great disturbances of various magnitudes and duration. Whether created by man or nature, they all have the same tragic consequence for millions of human beings: loss of life, unspeakable suffering and the destruction of goods and infrastructure.

Faced with adverse and sometimes extreme conditions whose horrors the modern media flash instantaneously into all our households, and when the response capability of countries, particularly of the developing countries, is diminished or significantly undermined, mankind suddenly seems reconciled, empathetic and unified; and from that perspective, humanitarian assistance provided by the United Nations is beneficial and of great value to stricken populations. This is why the strengthening of its coordination and cohesion, the broadening of its scope and the acceleration of its deployment are urgent and essential.

In fact, humanitarian assistance is increasingly becoming an important area of our Organization's activities. It is the subject of determined interest and sustained follow-up within the United Nations system, as well as for international public opinion. In response to the reform proposals of the Secretary-General, the Economic and Social Council has begun a well-conceived tradition of holding a humanitarian segment during its annual substantive session. Although it is still too early to try to assess an experience of only two years, we must recognize the contribution this segment is making, thanks to the exchange of views and concerted action it provides in the advancement and coordination of international cooperation to improve the Organization's capacities in the area of humanitarian assistance. Sharing the same major goals, but with a vision of greater breadth and scope, the General Assembly makes a useful, indispensable contribution to the intergovernmental debates on the subject through its consideration of this item. As a global forum, the Assembly cannot shirk this debate, particularly at a time when humanitarian assistance is a subject of growing concern.

As is highlighted in the Secretary-General's report on the issue, crises and humanitarian hotbeds continue to grow in number and complexity throughout the world, subjecting more and more individuals and populations to unspeakable suffering and wrenching misery. Faced with this distressing and disturbing situation, it can be legitimately asked whether our Organization has the capacity and means enabling it to act promptly and effectively to provide relief to the greatest possible number of victims. The Organization's capacity in the area of humanitarian assistance has definitely been improving, which must be welcomed. We have seen more cohesive, better-targeted, better-coordinated and greatly reinforced action within both the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Moreover, as is reflected in the results of the inspection undertaken by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has succeeded in making considerable progress in rationalization and reorganization, thus strengthening the Organization's capacity to intervene during new humanitarian crises and tightening its coordination with other entities of the system in the context of funds and programmes, as well as with the international community as a whole, particularly regarding the procedure for consolidated appeals.

For that procedure to be effective, however, it must take other factors into account, such as the participation of the authorities of the country involved in a disaster in formulating the appeal so that they can take real control of the needs that emerge as a result of the priorities they have established. Closer cooperation to this end among the various actors is needed to rationalize both efforts and means in such times of difficulty. Indeed, the system's response capacity continues to depend on certain factors, primarily the lack of resources — financial resources, in particular — earmarked for emergency relief, the volume of which, according to the Secretary-General, has declined by 40 per cent over the last five years.

Such situations are all the more harmful for the victims when the international community does not respond to them equally; it does not take equal interest in

the various crises that batter our world. Humanitarian assistance should be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality to alleviate suffering and to satisfy the most basic needs of individuals in distress.

From this point of view, we fully share the concern and the preoccupation expressed in the Secretary-General's report regarding the selectivity practised by the donors, which results in an unequal distribution of resources among the various humanitarian hotbeds throughout the world, including the numerous humanitarian crises in Africa. Africa also has the dubious honour of accounting for the greatest number of refugees and displaced persons and is the region of the world that suffers most seriously.

Of the $800 million requested by the Secretary-General for Africa, less than 40 per cent has been mobilized. As a result, the Secretary-General was forced last August to launch a new appeal for $500 million, and we hope this time that appeal will be fully heeded. If this trend were to persist, it would be likely to have serious consequences for the affected African populations; indeed, this could damage the courageous and determined efforts of African leaders to settle conflicts, preserve peace on the continent and reconstruct their countries. This is why we call upon the international community to commit itself more vigorously to humanitarian responses to refugees' needs in order to alleviate their suffering while they wait to go home, as well as to ensuring that peace will have a chance to become lasting, thus promoting economic recovery and development.

As the Secretary-General emphasized in his report, 1998 saw natural disasters occurring on an exceptional scale and with great frequency. With its unsurpassed costs in terms of human and financial numbers, claiming some 50,000 victims and causing economic losses exceeding $90 billion throughout the world, 1998 was an *annus horribilis*, that clearly illustrated the extreme vulnerability of developing countries to natural disasters of all types. This is even more tragic in those countries with already existing situations of humanitarian emergencies compounded by natural disasters.

Here we cannot fail to reiterate the need for more investment in disaster warning and prevention systems, as well as in the process of mitigation or alleviation of the effects of disasters. It goes without saying that there is an emphatic need to stress the integration of the dimension of prevention and reduction of natural disasters in international development strategies.

As a result of the many and varied constraints that they experience, the developing countries are still sorely lacking the means to cope effectively and promptly with disasters. This is the case for human resources, as well as for financial and technical resources; and it goes without saying that the contribution of international cooperation in these areas is not only desirable, but indispensable. Thus, the international community's efforts to provide adequate support in the long run could pay off in terms of substantially reducing assistance needs for humanitarian assistance in times of disaster. The international cooperation that exists now must continue, and it must be stepped up. For its part, Algeria is pleased to have made its modest contribution to the international effort for solidarity and cooperation in this field, and it will continue to do so to the best of its ability.

The issue of the security of humanitarian personnel is of paramount importance, because it affects a fundamental aspect of humanitarian assistance provided to countries during natural disasters or other humanitarian emergency situations. Algeria shares the serious concern that has been so broadly expressed both by the United Nations humanitarian agencies and by the international community as a whole regarding the disturbing number of victims who have paid a heavy price while serving under trying conditions, and sometimes at risk of their lives, to try to alleviate the suffering of their brothers and sisters.

From this point of view, measures to strengthen the security of humanitarian aid workers, as advocated by the Secretariat, deserve our support. These measures include creating greater awareness and better mobilization to promote respect for humanitarian rules and principles, particularly in this year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. At the same time, because of the rather numerous, complex and sensitive aspects involved, the issue needs to be appropriately considered through a comprehensive and level-headed debate in order to promote a more favourable atmosphere for humanitarian aid workers of the United Nations and its agencies, in accordance with the relevant rules and principles.

The subject of humanitarian intervention, which forced its way into our debates early in this session, has now once again raised questions and issues regarding the role of the humanitarian aspect in a world in which borders are gradually disappearing, and regarding conditions for granting humanitarian assistance to populations in need.

Algeria has dealt at length with this issue on two occasions — here in the Assembly and in the Security Council — and we would like to recall here that in no possible way can it sanction steps that, in the name of humanitarian considerations, are in fact designed to violate the sovereignty of States, respect for their independence and territorial integrity, and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States, principles consecrated in the United Nations Charter. We are all the more reluctant to do so since we have apprehensions that this right of intervention could be used by the larger countries to interfere in the affairs of the smaller ones. In the last analysis, the real objective of such actions is to impose a political order in the guise of a humanitarian order, and thus to use noble humanitarian principles for strategic or political ends.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.

United Nations A/54/PV.59

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

59th plenary meeting
Friday, 19 November 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Jordán-Pando (Bolivia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Agenda item 20 *(continued)*

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/619)

(a) **Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations**

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/154 and Add.1)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.17/Rev.1)

(b) **Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions**

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/54/129/Rev.1, A/54/130/Rev.1, A/54/153, A/54/278, A/54/294, A/54/295, A/54/296, A/54/350, A/54/421, A/54/462, A/54/534)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.29)

(c) **Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster**

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/449)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.22)

(d) **Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development**

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/217)

(e) **Assistance to the Palestinian people**

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/134)

Mrs. Kumari (India): We thank the Secretary-General for the reports which are under discussion today. They are comprehensive and respond to the importance that the international community attaches to the crucial issue of humanitarian assistance.

India accords the highest importance to the provision by the United Nations of humanitarian assistance to those in need, in accordance with the established guiding principles so clearly outlined in section I of the annex to resolution 46/182. These principles are valid and time-tested and must be observed. Humanitarian assistance

99-86521 (E)

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must continue to be based on neutrality, impartiality and full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States. It must be provided with the consent of the affected countries and on their appeal, and it must respect the primacy of the role of the affected State in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.

We are therefore happy to observe that the second humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council earlier this year reaffirmed that humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with, and with due respect for, these principles. We support all humanitarian activities under the auspices of the United Nations within these parameters. What we cannot accept is any assertion that the offer or availability of humanitarian assistance by the United Nations can confer any right for humanitarian intervention, for which there is no legal basis under the United Nations Charter.

Despite its own resource constraints, India provides substantial humanitarian assistance, in the spirit of South-South solidarity, to those affected by natural disasters or other humanitarian emergencies. Some recent examples include our assistance to the peoples of Afghanistan, Palestine, Bangladesh, Sudan and Tajikistan as well as the Central American and Caribbean countries, which suffered devastating hurricanes last year.

We are, however, deeply concerned that the levels of funding for humanitarian assistance have been declining over the last few years, both in absolute terms and also as a proportion of programme requirements. During the past year, some of the appeals were funded at the woefully low level of 4 per cent of the overall requirements. Similarly, while estimated economic losses due to natural disasters tripled to $90 billion in 1998, the relief assistance made available by the international community was hardly $1 billion, as indicated in paragraph 31 of the report (A/54/154) before us. There is therefore an urgent need to ensure provision of adequate financial resources for the implementation of activities related to humanitarian assistance, while ensuring at the same time that such resources are additional to, and not diverted from, the already scarce resources for development.

The widespread perception that this decline in resources for humanitarian assistance is often related to the political predilections of donors to various crises or to levels of media interest also needs to be addressed. We fully support the view of the Secretary-General that humanitarian assistance should not be driven by media coverage, politics or geography. Its sole criterion should be human need. Otherwise, as the Secretary- General has observed, if we are not true to this ethic, we will be accused of inconsistency at best and hypocrisy at worst. Considering that the vast majority of humanitarian emergencies relate to natural disasters, it is perplexing to note that the attention these crises attract relative to complex humanitarian emergencies is so disproportionately inadequate. We must redouble our efforts to correct these dangerous anomalies.

At the previous session of the General Assembly, which is the primary organ dealing with humanitarian issues, we had called for a consolidated report by the Emergency Relief Coordinator on the implications of underfunding, including forced changes in priorities and cancellation of activities. We noted in paragraph 11 of the report the dangerous implications of such uneven sectoral funding, which does not ensure a necessary minimum of care.

The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), addressing the Security Council a few months back, said:

> "Humanitarian assistance cannot be used as an instrument for bringing political pressure to bear on any party to a conflict." (*S/PV. 3977, p. 3*)

We therefore strongly support the view of the Secretary-General that uneven geographical funding threatens to undermine the basic principle of humanitarian assistance, that is, provision of aid irrespective of political considerations. We are, however, surprised to observe that the programme narratives of the sections on humanitarian assistance in the budget documents indicate that strategic coordination of humanitarian assistance with political strategy and human rights objectives would be a focus of the policy and analysis subprogramme.

Clear distinctions need to be made in defining the relationship between the functions and imperatives of peacekeeping and peacemaking and the principle of humanitarian access. Similarly, distinctions must be maintained between the political, peacekeeping, human rights and humanitarian work of the United Nations. These activities may be mutually reinforcing, but the distinctions are nevertheless both valid and crucial if the trust that the United Nations enjoys in the field of humanitarian assistance is to be retained. We are

therefore glad to note, in paragraph 14 of document A/54/154, that the United Nations proposes strictly to maintain the distinction between humanitarian negotiations for access and security, and negotiations on a political settlement of the conflict. We also note with satisfaction that this distinction was recognized by the Economic and Social Council during its most recent humanitarian affairs segment.

We hope that the joint launching of the consolidated appeals, begun this year, will assist efforts for resource mobilization. We also support increases in the capacity of the United Nations to respond immediately to requests for emergency disaster assistance, and we would be similarly supportive of the delegation of authority to recruit emergency field staff. We also welcome the proposals to make Central Emergency Revolving Fund resources available for natural disasters, as well as the proposals to utilize the resources available under the Central Emergency Revolving Fund to partially redress the geographical and sectoral imbalance in the funding of humanitarian appeals. We commend the innovative practice of the transitional appeal in the aftermath of hurricane Mitch. Although it did not receive the financial support required, we would suggest that the United Nations continue with this and similar innovative measures at the request of concerned Governments. However, these mechanisms, welcome as they are, will prove to be of limited value until the question of the overall paucity of donor response and its uneven distribution are addressed.

In this climate of shrinking resource flows, it is essential to ensure optimal and effective utilization of available funds. Capacities existing in developing countries, which are often closer to the site of natural disasters or other humanitarian emergencies and therefore available at lower cost, would certainly provide a viable modality for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of limited resources. Existing structures for disaster mitigation and relief assistance in developing countries should be fruitfully utilized for providing training to humanitarian personnel.

We note with concern, in paragraph 60 of the report in document A/54/154, that the release of funds for rehabilitation during the transition phase following emergency relief measures in the wake of natural disasters is usually too late and subject to serious political, procedural and administrative constraints. In order to effectively redress this situation, we strongly support the Secretary-General's view, expressed in paragraph 65 of the report, that funds for reconstruction should be made available sooner and with significantly less onerous procedures than is the case today. This cannot be overemphasized, since, as noted in the report, capacities for immediate relief often exist within the public administration of the affected countries, but as the needs shift from emergency situations to the longer term, the lack of capacities, including financial resources, becomes dramatically apparent.

I would like to briefly touch upon the new and emerging causes of humanitarian crises in this era of globalization, such as those triggered by the impact of financial crises, leading to dramatically rising levels of dire poverty and political instability. In a sense, this is a good governance issue requiring action by the Governments of countries from whose unregulated trading floors some of these crises have originated. Furthermore, the phenomenon of economic globalization has weakened the authority of the State in crucial socio-economic sectors, thereby adversely affecting its political legitimacy. In our view, the need of the hour is to strengthen the nation State and not to further weaken it. In the ultimate analysis, in any crisis, whether economic or political, the final guarantee of the well-being of all is the presence of a responsible and functioning State. Furthermore, as the External Affairs Minister of India said in addressing this General Assembly, strong States are essential to ensure a strong United Nations. A United Nations composed of weak States can only weaken the United Nations.

We note in paragraph 29 of the report in document A/54/154 that the Secretary-General has asked the Emergency Relief Coordinator to ensure that gaps in assistance to internally displaced persons are addressed. In undertaking these tasks, we should be cautious about uncritically endorsing new concepts that are still evolving in other forums. Similarly, we would be unable to support ideas calling for greater collaboration between United Nations humanitarian assistance and the Comprehensive Development Framework of the World Bank. The Comprehensive Development Framework is still a pilot project, with several questions remaining unanswered about its utility and effectiveness even in normal developmental situations. Its application to countries in crisis would be tantamount to the imposition of an additional burden, without any guarantee of additional benefits, on those who are most ill-placed to bear them.

We agree with the comments in paragraphs 86 to 90 of the report outlining the recurrent gaps in the context of the reintegration of returnees, demobilization, issues

relating to children and comprehensive mine action programmes. But the central question of transitions in complex humanitarian emergencies is strengthening the role of the Governments concerned. We fully support the view of the Secretary-General that while all elements of post-conflict reconstruction are important, failures in structuring assistance in a manner that helps rebuild the capacity of government to effectively regulate competing claims of different sections of society would produce a high risk of return to conflict.

India accords the highest importance to disaster reduction and prevention, as well as to the provision of relief and urgent steps towards rehabilitation and reconstruction when natural disasters strike. Like several other countries, India has put in place a central focal point for natural disaster reduction and response. A Natural Disaster Management Programme has been implemented as a central scheme since December 1993 to enhance national capacity for disaster reduction, preparedness and mitigation. The scheme also attempts to enhance the level of awareness of the local communities about disasters they may face and to prepare them adequately to face any crisis situation in the future. We are seeking to achieve this through human resource development, research and consultancy services, documentation of major events and the establishment of centres for disaster management at the State level. These activities are being undertaken not only through governmental departments, but also through non-governmental organizations and scientific and technical institutions. Efforts are also being made to fully involve the media in these activities.

Recently, a week-long international workshop and regional meeting on storm surges was organized jointly by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the World Meteorological Organization, in cooperation with the Government of India. At the meeting it was decided to create a regional project office in New Delhi to develop necessary infrastructure for providing effective and timely storm surge forecasts and warnings. The project will also encourage investment for sustainable coastal development and thus reduce the aggravation of poverty caused by storm surge disasters in the region.

A crisis management group has been established in the Cabinet secretariat to ensure a coordinated response to disasters when they strike. Recently, two cyclones wrought serious devastation in the Indian province of Orissa. As in the past, we have tackled the task of providing immediate relief through our efforts and institutions, and we will continue to do so as we move on to the next stage, that of reconstruction and rehabilitation. We are very grateful for the solidarity shown by the international community, including the General Assembly and its President, and by the Secretary-General. The high-level task force constituted for rehabilitation and reconstruction will draw up a reconstruction plan for the area. At that stage, should the Government of India need external assistance in the implementation of its national priorities, we will approach the international community accordingly.

I would now like to refer briefly to agenda item 20 (e), on assistance to the Palestinian people. India, despite its own limitations, has been contributing to the process of assistance to the Palestinian people through scholarships and cultural exchange programmes. India provided specialized training to 58 students of Palestine during the period April 1998 to March 1999. All expenditure on training costs, including board and lodging, is borne by the Government of India. India also pledged $1 million at the Washington donors conference in October 1995 and another $1 million at the subsequent pledging conference in Paris in January 1996. These pledges have already been honoured through full disbursement. At the third donors conference, held in Washington on 30 November 1998, India pledged an additional $1 million as assistance to Palestine. Of this, the sum of $300,000 has already been disbursed to the University of Al Azhar in Gaza for the construction of two additional floors to its library; the remainder will be utilized for the human resource development programme.

Although the Assembly will take up the item on Afghanistan later, I wish to note that the humanitarian situation there is assuming serious proportions. Continuing discrimination against girls, women and religious minorities is of great concern. The forced displacement of the civilian population by the Taliban, the torching of residential houses, the burning of crops, the cutting of trees, the deliberate destruction of sparse infrastructure including the irrigation system in the Shumali plains, the indiscriminate aerial bombing of civilians and the denial of access to the Shumali plains are impeding the provision of relief material to thousands of internally displaced persons. We are concerned also at the worsening plight of civilians in the Hazarajat area and in Bamian. We have contributed to alleviating the suffering of the Afghan people as best as we could, by sending humanitarian assistance. Our efforts in this direction, which are outlined in paragraph 69 of the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/54/297, will continue both bilaterally and through the United Nations system. We hope that the constraints on

humanitarian assistance that were outlined by the Secretary-General last year, and that presumably account for his reference in paragraph 2 of his report to a complicated web of external and internal political factors affecting humanitarian assistance, will be soon overcome.

I wish to express my delegation's deep appreciation and admiration for the dedication and commitment with which many relief and assistance organizations and personnel, both United Nations and non-United Nations, are functioning under the most difficult and trying conditions to bring succour to those in need. They often work under daily threats to their own personal safety and security and deserve our unstinting praise. The threats faced by humanitarian personnel as well as by United Nations staff have been clearly brought out in the addendum to the Secretary-General's report (A/54/154/Add.1). We are concerned that there has been an increasing trend towards such threats and towards threats and violence against all those protected under international humanitarian law. We salute those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the promotion of our cause, and we trust that such cases will become rare and, it is hoped, will cease in the years to come. However, we need serious introspection to ensure that the increasing attacks on humanitarian aid workers do not take place on account of humanitarian assistance being perceived as biased and hence as part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

It is clear that the safety and security of those providing humanitarian assistance will not be ensured by the signature of United Nations conventions or by the resolutions solemnly adopted by the General Assembly. They can be ensured only when humanitarian assistance is perceived to be genuinely impartial and neutral, and when it is provided in accordance with the guiding principles so clearly enunciated by the General Assembly.

Mr. Khetagurov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): On the whole, the Russian delegation has a positive assessment of the work that has been accomplished on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

We believe that much of the praise for this should go to Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. During this year alone, beyond his everyday administration of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, he has personally been carrying out the most important missions, entrusted to him by the Secretary-General, including heading the United Nations Inter-Agency Needs Assessment Mission in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, leading on a temporary basis the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, and now heading the United Nations Mission in East Timor. We wish the Emergency Relief Coordinator success in the fulfilment of this new mission. We also wish success to the recently appointed Officer-in-Charge of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Ms. Carolyn McAskie.

We consider disaster relief activities to be of great importance for the implementation of humanitarian operations, especially with respect to guaranteeing access to those in need of assistance, the safety and security of humanitarian personnel, coordination in the field and strengthening the early-warning capacity and natural-disaster preparedness of countries. In our view, it is important to strengthen the relationship among peacekeeping, peace-building, the protection of human rights, the provision of humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and development.

At the summer session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the agreed conclusions of the humanitarian affairs segment gave guidelines to United Nations system agencies and bodies functioning within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) for further improving coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance, particularly in such a complicated and important area as the transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development after natural disasters and in other complex emergencies. It is an important matter of principle that the agreed conclusions have confirmed the fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance stipulated in the annex to General Assembly resolution 46/182: humanity, neutrality and impartiality. There can be no exemptions from these principles. Humanitarian assistance can and should be provided only on the basis of these criteria.

We recognize as a positive development that the Council acknowledged the necessity of giving proper consideration to the humanitarian impact of sanctions in order to minimize their negative consequences. As regards improving strategic planning of emergency operations, we particularly take note of the role of consolidated inter-agency appeals. To our regret, funding of such appeals has been extremely uneven, mainly because of an absence of political will on the part of the donors, sometimes contrary to the fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance.

We highly value actions by the United Nations system in coordinating steps to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters. Taking into consideration the sound financial situation of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF), we consider it appropriate to use CERF resources to fund activities related to natural disasters and technological catastrophes.

We also recognize the importance of the agreed conclusions of ECOSOC concerning the need for a comprehensive approach by the United Nations and other interested partners in the transition to rehabilitation and reconstruction in the Balkans. Unfortunately, adequate steps are being taken neither to restore the economy of Yugoslavia, destroyed by the bombings, nor to aid in providing humanitarian assistance to the population of the entire territory of that country. This can be seen from conclusions in the report on the status of the "Electricity and Heating in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: winter 1999-2000", prepared at the request of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). If emergency measures are not taken, Yugoslavia will face an energy and, consequently, a humanitarian crisis during the coming winter. The experts of a group called "Focus", a joint humanitarian initiative of Austria, Greece, Russia and Switzerland which assessed the condition of destroyed and damaged heating equipment and the systems of energy and water supply, came to the same conclusions. As assessed by the experts of Focus, the situation with regard to public health and the environment is also difficult. This can also be seen in the report of the Joint UNEP-Habitat Balkan Task Force. Whole branches of industry and infrastructure have been destroyed. There are hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced people. That situation requires that the international community adopt urgent measures, which is the aim of the draft resolution we have prepared on this issue.

We appreciate the role the United Nations in dealing with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. In spite of the fact that 13 years have already passed since the Chernobyl catastrophe, its consequences are still acute due to their material, lasting nature. At present, Russia is implementing several federal programmes, including for the protection of the population against the impact of catastrophes for the period to the year 2000, and for children of Chernobyl and for housing for the catastrophe mitigators.

Despite its difficult economic situation, Russia allocates considerable funds to mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. Yet a shortage of funds for this purpose persists. International assistance, including that of the United Nations, has been an important addition to our own efforts in implementing Chernobyl projects. Only yesterday, 18 November, there was a meeting of the Quadripartite Committee for Coordination on Chernobyl at United Nations Headquarters, with the participation of the United Nations, the affected countries and the donor countries. Unfortunately none of the priority Chernobyl projects for each of the three countries affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe has been funded.

The United Nations system remains the only one which, according to its capacity, is at least trying to facilitate funding and implementation of the approved projects. In this regard, we would like to recognize the positive role of United Nations bodies such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the International Labour Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and the United Nations Development Programme, as well as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and a number of non-governmental organizations which have helped mitigate medical, economic, environmental, social, psychological and other consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. We should also like to note the work done by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Chernobyl.

The disaster has led to severe problems in the affected territories. At the same time, it has provided a tremendous source of information for the international community which has allowed others to prevent a similar tragedy. By that, we believe, donor assistance has been repaid in many ways.

The relevant draft resolution prepared by Belarus, Russia and Ukraine contains an appeal to the United Nations to continue its Chernobyl-related activities and calls upon donor countries and organizations to support the relief efforts of the three countries, including in the framework of the United Nations Appeal for International Cooperation on Chernobyl last spring.

Turning to another area of humanitarian need, we appreciate the efforts of the international community to provide aid to the population of Afghanistan without any discrimination. Such aid should complement efforts to promote the readiness of the Afghani parties to search for a political solution to the conflict, to ensure safety of the activities of international organizations in Afghanistan, to

deny haven to international terrorists and to take measures on fighting illicit drug trafficking.

We think it important that the General Assembly should again adopt this year a resolution on emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and rehabilitation in Tajikistan, since in spite of the positive developments which have taken place in this country this year, the general humanitarian situation continues to be acute and a considerable part of the Tajik population still needs assistance from the international community, all the more so since such assistance is an investment in peace and normalcy in that country.

It is necessary to continue to pay priority attention to the complex emergencies in Africa. Humanitarian assistance should be provided to all affected people and should promote peaceful settlement of conflicts.

In recent years, we have witnessed a growing number of large-scale natural disasters, including the hurricanes Mitch and George, earthquakes in Afghanistan, Colombia, Turkey, Greece and other areas, floods in India, China and Bangladesh, forest fires in Brazil, Indonesia and Russia. The human and material losses have grown considerably. In 1998 alone more than 50,000 people died as a result of natural disasters, and the economic damage approached $100 billion. These disasters have become a serious destabilizing factor. Reducing the damage caused by such catastrophes and addressing their consequences requires the joint efforts of the international community as well as the use of state-of-the-art technologies and considerable resources.

The experience of recent years — in particular, with addressing the consequences of tremendous earthquakes, forest fires and other emergencies — has vividly confirmed this. At the same time, it has shed light on a number of problems, such as the insufficient coordination of the activities of rescue units from different countries, the absence of a clear division of labour and the inadequate use of the most modern technologies in relief efforts.

The head of the Russian delegation, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr. Ivanov, in his statement at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, already spoke of the importance of considering establishing an international agency for emergencies which would unite international efforts and mechanisms so as to deal with the consequences of natural and man-made disasters and to coordinate urgent, expert approaches to saving human lives in the first hours and days after a disaster. What benefits do we see in coordinating the efforts of national and international rescue services through the establishment of such an international mechanism?

Joint actions by national rescue services, a kind of international grouping of rescue operations using transport and special-task aircraft to support the natural-disaster relief activities and rescue and humanitarian operations have already been tested. A number of countries, including Russia, have experience in using long-range aviation for transportation of rescue helicopters and rescue units prepared for immediate involvement in rescue operations. It is important to organize promptly the coordination of activities of rescue units arriving in areas of emergencies. To this end on each continent a focal point for mobilizing and coordinating actions should be established by making use of one or another national-level rescue mechanisms.

As a first stage we could consider the establishment, under the United Nations auspices, of a network composed of the country-level, bilateral, regional and multilateral units that have been created to address the consequences of natural and man-made disasters. This network would allow for expeditious and coordinated responses to these natural and man-made catastrophes. We believe that such a network would complement, rather than duplicate, the existing United Nations mechanisms in this field.

Russian and international experience in international efforts to address the consequences of major disasters shows that for the successful rescue of those who are still alive — I emphasize, those who are still alive — it is necessary to work out in advance — before the announcement of any given catastrophe — the following crucial elements. These are the establishment of a global rapid notification network, strengthening the coordination of countries' emergency response units, and, of course, the division of labour among all national participants of international rescue operations. There also need to be exchanges of experiences and the introduction of new rescue technologies. These, in our view, are basic components around which an international agency for emergencies could be built.

It seems to us that the consideration of an idea of an international mechanism to resolve these problems should begin as soon as possible, and that this mechanism should constitute an important contribution to the implementation of the follow-up to the International Decade for Natural

Disaster Reduction, along with the international disaster-reduction strategy and the activities of the Inter-Agency Task Force and the inter-agency secretariat operating under the direct authority of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

We hope that at a certain stage a comprehensive consideration of our idea by the Member States will lead to the adoption of a relevant resolution on this issue.

Mr. Larraín (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): For my country, all activities related to humanitarian assistance hold particular significance. This is due to the fact that we have always had to deal with difficult and quite often painful crisis situations caused by natural disasters of various forms and extents. We have also witnessed complex crises such as the ones in Kosovo, Angola, Sierra Leone, among others, whose impact and consequences also affect us.

In this context we commend the work carried out to date by the United Nations in the sphere of humanitarian assistance. In particular we are thankful for the interesting report of the Secretary-General in which he deals in depth with the most varied aspects of these crises.

In addition we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, for the outstanding work he has been doing in directing the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). We wish him every success in his new assignment: Head of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor.

Turning to the work of the United Nations, we believe that the activities of the Economic and Social Council, in particular of its humanitarian segment, should contribute to generating a climate of trust regarding humanitarian work. It is essential to highlight the strictly non-political and impartial character of these activities. We feel that this character must be given priority, both in the coordination of this work and the policy guidelines for it, as well as, by extension, in the activities of humanitarian assistance organizations and agencies.

Preserving this character in the humanitarian sphere is not only one of the fundamental bases for effective international action; it is also an indispensable precondition for transparency in humanitarian responses and international cooperation. There is no doubt that these elements are of particular importance for maintaining the credibility of humanitarian work and its universal worth, as well as for dispelling any shadow of a doubt regarding interventionist aims or attempts to impinge upon the sovereignty of States.

In addition, the principles and norms of international humanitarian law urgently need preserving and strengthening. For Chile the efforts being carried out to avoid and/or to ease the suffering of civilian populations is particularly important. Among these I would highlight these populations' most disadvantaged and vulnerable sectors, such as women and children, who are the principal victims of humanitarian crises.

In the efforts undertaken to that end, we believe that the United Nations should decisively support the positive contribution being made by civil society, in particular by non-governmental organizations, in the global response to serious humanitarian emergency situations. My country feels that this role must be adequately recognized and encouraged.

In another context, we share the opinion of those who claim that the main responsibility devolves primarily to the State where a humanitarian emergency arises. At the same time, however, we are aware of the need to ensure the availability of international cooperation to assist those States that, given the magnitude of potential crises, may not have adequate capacity to respond or for which this response will be an oppressive burden that threatens their own development. In this regard, we believe that we have important work ahead to develop a rapid reaction and response capacity for dealing with these situations and for assisting countries that do not have their won capacity to address and resolve serious humanitarian problems.

Moreover, there is no doubt that, from the development perspective, the economic, ecological, environmental and social impact on host countries is an issue that requires the full attention of the international community. It is neither reasonable nor just for those countries which, together, assume the enormous burden of massive refugee flows into their territories also to have to bear the high costs of such humanitarian emergencies.

Indeed, the serious damage caused by epidemics, the deterioration of arable land and the environment, and other aspects of humanitarian emergencies poses a terrible and real threat to those host countries — many of which are also affected by disturbing situations of extreme poverty — and to the sustainability of their

development process. We run the risk that the solidarity of these countries will be seriously shaken by the lack of adequate response from the international system to their complex realities, as has happened in the recent past.

Regarding humanitarian emergencies arising out of armed conflict, a political commitment to facilitating the difficult tasks undertaken by humanitarian personnel and to protecting their integrity and safety must be made by all those involved. It is clear that this important aspect of the humanitarian response is also closely linked to the guarantee of transparent and apolitical humanitarian response, in which personnel fully respect the national laws of the State in which such operations are undertaken.

Finally, this would seem to be the appropriate opportunity to refer to the experience we have gained in disaster reduction through the positive impact of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction on this area. The United Nations can make an important contribution to increasing and strengthening international cooperation for prevention.

I would stress, however, that the spirit of good faith in which these activities are undertaken obliges States to abstain from adopting legislation that is incompatible with the principles and standards of international humanitarian law and of internationally recognized human rights.

Finally, Chile fully agrees that there is a need to ensure gender equality in the development of humanitarian policies and activities. In this respect, it would be most interesting were the Emergency Relief Coordinator, together with the Division for the Advancement of Women, periodically to provide information on measures adopted and achievements made to meet this need.

Mr. Albin (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Humanitarian assistance is one of the most noble expressions of the fundamental solidarity of the human spirit in the face of the global challenges of nature and history.

It is regrettable that, in addition to human tragedies caused by natural disasters, emergency situations arise from the perpetuation and eruption of conflicts.

On the eve of the new millennium, when human society has the resources necessary to meet the most pressing needs of the world's peoples, the strengthening of international cooperation for development is a major priority. It is always more costly to cure than to prevent. Development is and will continue to be the best deterrent to conflicts and, at the same time, the most efficient catalyst of efforts to deal with the forces of nature.

Humanitarian assistance is undoubtedly a complex task requiring clearly defined parameters. That is why Mexico supports the guiding principles established in General Assembly resolution 46/182. That important resolution is both a plan of action and a code of conduct for the deployment of international solidarity.

Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. It is essential that it be provided with due respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States, in compliance with the United Nations Charter and always at the request or with the consent of the receiving State.

At the same time, we need to adopt an integral approach that, in accordance with the priorities determined by national Governments, will ensure that the United Nations system is adapted and strengthened effectively to assume its central role of providing leadership and coordinating the efforts of the international community to assist countries affected by natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies, with the full integration of emergency assistance and the tasks of rehabilitation, reconstruction and development.

We share the international concern for the security of humanitarian workers and consider it to be a key element of the efficiency of humanitarian assistance. The greatest possible support for humanitarian personnel is essential. We extend our condolences to the families of those humanitarian workers who have died in the line of duty.

Throughout the world, the impact of natural disasters has increased significantly in terms of the number of catastrophes and victims, as well as of the scale of damage. This has had serious social consequences and severely hindered the economic development of the nations affected. The Government of Mexico offers its condolences and solidarity to all those countries that have been recently struck by natural disasters. We also extend our thanks to those peoples of the world that have offered their sympathy to the people of Mexico in difficult times.

The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and our international activities in addressing the effects of the meteorological phenomena of El Niño,

hurricanes Mitch and Georges, the floods in China and Bangladesh, the earthquakes in Turkey or the cyclone in India, among other disasters, have enabled us to forge a growing awareness and solidarity. The experience gained by the international community has shown the urgency and the necessity of shifting from a response perspective to an integral strategy which in terms of sustainable development worldwide will focus more on preventing and producing natural disasters.

In this regard, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Rio Group, who met in Mexico last May, attached the greatest importance to promoting regional technical cooperation efforts in the field of natural disasters on an ongoing basis for every phase, including of prevention, early warning, emergency, mitigation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Similarly, at the recent summit at Rio de Janeiro, the representatives of Latin America and the Caribbean and of the European Union agreed to set up a programme of cooperation in the area of natural disasters and to establish a system to make effective use of international assistance in all phases.

The United Nations is called upon to play an important role in structuring an integrated international strategy to deal with natural disasters. We urgently need national directories of civil protection organizations with updated inventories of resources available for assistance during disasters, and manuals which will guide us in the effective management of international cooperation. Our Organization must have the answers to the why, how and who in the area of international cooperation for natural disasters.

Given this priority, my country is working actively to achieve the broadest consensus possible in this Assembly for the establishment of an integral international strategy on natural disasters through two ways: providing adequate follow-up on efforts deployed in the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and strengthening international cooperation and humanitarian assistance during natural disasters in all phases.

Humanitarian assistance is a task for all of us and involves us all. In carrying it out, we should bring together the provisions of international law, the framework of efforts and conduct we have agreed on and the promotion and benefit of solidarity among peoples and nations. These are and will continue to be the core of Mexico's contribution to this noble cause of the United Nations.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): Over the last decade the world has seen a growing number of natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies. In particular, natural disasters have been on the rise, spreading destruction and reversing development, their impact aggravated by human activity and poverty. There has also been an increase in the number of civil wars, in which civilian populations are not incidental casualties but direct targets. Conflicts, whether they be new, re-ignited or protracted, are leading to increasingly complex emergencies. A brutal disregard for humanitarian norms places humanitarian workers at risk and denies them access to victims in conflict zones.

This creates a formidable humanitarian agenda. Norway agrees with the Secretary-General when, in his annual report on the work of the Organization, he calls on us to address the root causes, not merely the symptoms.

We must continue to strengthen our capacity to bring humanitarian relief to victims. But we must also vigorously devise more effective strategies to reduce vulnerability and to prevent emergencies from arising in the first place. In short, we must, as the Secretary-General suggests, create a culture of prevention.

Norway welcomes the institutional progress achieved by the United Nations system over the past year in managing the humanitarian agenda. Improved mechanisms for coordination have indeed led to a more effective response capacity and to a more constant focus on meeting the humanitarian challenge. The Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, has consolidated its position as the focal point for the coordination of humanitarian policy. The recently expanded composition and agenda of the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs provide an important link between the humanitarian, political and development components of the United Nations system. Last but not least, I would like to recall the many useful meetings of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with the Security Council.

Norway also welcomes the trend towards closer relations between the humanitarian and the political activities of the United Nations at the inter-governmental level, facilitating a move from reaction to prevention in both these spheres. In this regard, I would particularly like to recall the Security Council's extensive debates on post-conflict peace-building and on the causes of conflict

and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, in which the Council endorsed a range of conflict-prevention measures. Only two months ago, the Secretary-General presented to the Council his report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/1999/957), containing 40 recommendations. We welcome that the Council, in its resolution 1265 (1999), decided to establish a process to consider further appropriate steps.

The report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/54/154) was considered in full at the humanitarian segment of this year's main session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Allow me to reiterate Norway's appreciation for the achievements reflected in the report, including common country assessments, a stronger resident humanitarian coordinator system, the improved Consolidated Appeals Process and the development of a generic strategic framework now to be tested in Sierra Leone. The humanitarian segment of the ECOSOC provides Governments with a welcome opportunity to conduct focused discussions and provide guidance in this important field. Norway appreciated the more operational and interactive thrust of the segment this year, and we would encourage further development of the format in this direction.

We note in the addendum to the Secretary-General's report that the year 1998, in particular, represented a severe deterioration in the security situation for humanitarian personnel, and that developments in 1999 thus far are equally distressing. In order to stop the indiscriminate violence, threats and harassment that humanitarian workers risk every day, we need to reinforce the respect accorded to humanitarian personnel and those who are carrying out the neutral and impartial work of the United Nations. Perpetrators of violence must be brought to justice. In this context, we view the establishment of the International Criminal Court as paramount. Let me take this opportunity to renew Norway's call for ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Likewise, Norway wishes to express its support for the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, which entered into force earlier this year. We would take this opportunity to encourage a larger number of Member States to ratify and implement this important legal instrument. Norway also urges more Member States to make contributions to the Trust Fund for Security of staff members of the United Nations system.

In dealing with the disasters and emergencies of the past year, our attention has been drawn to the obligation to respond to the humanitarian challenge in a consistent and even-handed way. The evolution of consolidated appeals for humanitarian assistance has been matched by an improved funding response, which now stands at 69 per cent — well over the 54 per cent achieved for the whole of 1998. Unfortunately, significant differences remain between the funding of individual country appeals, while the differences in response as between regions is far less pronounced than had been anticipated earlier this year.

The rights of victims to assistance should always be our point of departure, and their needs should dictate the quality and timeliness of the response — not geography or the nature of the disaster or media coverage. This is, in fact, the backbone of the Norwegian humanitarian strategy, presented by the Minister for International Development and Human Rights earlier this year. Our new strategy aims at achieving a more cohesive national approach to emergency, post-conflict, transition and development issues and is well in line with the Secretary-General's approach in his annual report on the work of the Organization and the programme budget for 2000-2001. An overriding concern of our strategy is the importance of addressing the root causes of conflict and disaster, including poverty, inequality and human rights issues. All responses to a crisis need to be integrated, and recovery should be placed within a broader development framework.

While increasing its contributions to humanitarian assistance, Norway has striven to raise awareness of the need for overlap between humanitarian assistance and long-term development efforts. Thus, we have noted with satisfaction the tendency towards a broader participation of development actors and a better integration of development activities in the consolidated appeals process. The recently issued appeal for East Timor provides a good example of overlap between shorter- and longer-term activities, and integration has been carried forward by the inclusive model adopted for coordination and planning in East Timor. In particular, the participation of non-governmental organizations is a welcome addition, and it will undoubtedly contribute to a more coherent humanitarian and development effort than previously seen.

Improved socio-economic development for the Palestinian people living in the occupied Palestinian territories is of crucial importance to the peace process in

the Middle East. This is why the Norwegian Government in 1998 renewed its commitment to the process by pledging a further $173 million dollars for the period 1999-2003. This pledge includes continued Norwegian contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as well as support to Palestinian institutions focusing on the planning, education, water and energy sectors. The development of sustainable, viable and well-managed public Palestinian institutions will enable the Palestinian Authority to improve living conditions and to meet the future needs of the Palestinian people.

International support and commitment to the peace process are of crucial importance. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, which Norway has been chairing, has provided a forum in which the Palestinian authorities and the international community have been able to express their priorities and concerns. Furthermore, the Ad Hoc Liaison group and the other coordination mechanisms have been facilitating the coordination of assistance to the Palestinian people, enabling adjustments and responses to both short-term and long-term humanitarian needs.

The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East peace process and the personal representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority will continue to play an important role in ensuring the achievement of a coordinated mechanism for United Nations activities. Pending the implementation of a final settlement to the refugee issue, the continued assistance of UNRWA remains indispensable to the Palestinian people.

Progress in the peace process requires continued, committed international support and rapid implementation of the pledges made at the 1998 ministerial conference to support Middle East peace and development, bearing in mind that economic and social development are essential for future peace in the region.

Mr. Huang Xueqi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): In the year soon coming to an end, there has been a considerable increase in the frequency, as well as in the magnitude, of natural disasters that have hit various parts of the world. In addition to some emergencies that have evolved into long-standing problems, there have been eruptions of one new armed conflict after another.

Large numbers of victims of natural disasters, refugees and internally displaced persons continue to live in dire misery. The Chinese delegation is deeply worried at this situation. We deplore the fact that the response from donor countries remains at a low level. We are also concerned at the trend towards imbalance in humanitarian assistance.

In the past 30 years, natural disasters all over the globe have increased threefold, with 90 per cent of the victims living in developing countries. However, humanitarian emergency relief funds provided by the international community have been on the decline, which undoubtedly is making things even more difficult for those victims least able to lift themselves out of misery. Severe natural disasters not only inflict loss of life and property, but are also likely to result in the stagnation, interruption, and, indeed, setbacks in the development process of poor countries already facing tremendous challenges.

The hard-won peace and stability in these countries will be jeopardized as a result. We may well predict that if the current situation is allowed to continue, things will get even worse down the road. The Chinese delegation fully supports the agreed conclusion adopted by the Economic and Social Council earlier this year, which demands that the international community, particularly donor countries, increase contributions to all consolidated appeals. We appeal to the international community, especially the donor countries, to make greater commitments in international relief assistance and to effectively implement the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.

In peacekeeping, as well as in post-conflict peace-building, the United Nations and the international community should strictly abide by the guiding principles laid down in the United Nations Charter and effectively comply with the principles of non-interference in internal affairs and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. United Nations bodies and agencies concerned, as well as regional organizations, should play their due roles within their respective terms of reference. This also applies to the international humanitarian efforts in conflict regions.

The Chinese Government attaches great importance to the important process of transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation, reconstruction and development, since a smooth transition will provide greater assurance for political stabilization, economic recovery and restoration of the normal life of the people of the countries concerned. We believe that initial plans for rehabilitation, reconstruction and development should be

drawn up while a situation is still in the stage of crisis management and relief programmes are being formulated. With a basic development strategy in place from the very beginning of the reconstruction efforts, gaps in the transitional period will be filled or reduced, thus leading to a more stable transition and, at the same time, achieving a better combination of humanitarian assistance with the strengthening of the disaster management capability of the recipient countries.

The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, now in its last year, is a long-term programme of critical importance to the formulation of international disaster reduction strategies. We believe that disaster reduction and prevention are an integral part of the sustainable development strategy. In international disaster relief efforts, focus should be shifted in future from post-disaster response to disaster-management approaches, including disaster prevention and preparedness. Efforts should be undertaken to gradually establish a sound, comprehensive disaster-relief stand-by mechanism. We welcome the decision adopted by the Economic and Social Council earlier this year on successor arrangements for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, as well as arrangements for the formulation of an international disaster reduction strategy. China, as a country prone to natural disasters, stands ready to participate actively in the discussions and studies in this field and to support and participate in common efforts to reduce and prevent disasters.

The "White Helmet" initiative, as an emergency disaster relief stand-by mechanism offered by States to the United Nations on a voluntary basis with pre-determined specialized human and technical resources, can be an important supplement to rapid and concerted humanitarian relief actions. The initiative, since it conforms to the idea of strengthening disaster relief coordination and reducing losses, deserves widespread and vigorous support. We hope that the United Nations bodies and agencies concerned will undertake further studies of this mechanism to help maximize its applicability and develop it into an active force capable of providing domestic as well as international relief.

The Chinese delegation is pleased with the work undertaken by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in its three core functions, particularly because, despite its severe lack of funds and staff at a time when disasters of every description multiply, it has overcome difficulties, risen to the challenges and responded rapidly to most disasters and emergency situations. The Chinese delegation supports the recommendation in the Secretary General's report that the regular budget provide more funds and staff for OCHA in order to enable it to function even better.

In conclusion, the Chinese delegation hopes that the review of work in the humanitarian field over the past year will lead to better efforts in summing up experiences and promoting dialogue, exchanges and coordination in humanitarian affairs, resulting in more enthusiastic responses to humanitarian needs and new contributions to the maintenance of peace and stability and joint development.

Mr. Samoilenko (Ukraine) (*spoke in Russian*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the delegation of Ukraine on sub-items 20 (b), "Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions", and (c), "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster".

The Chernobyl disaster occurred in the Ukraine, and after the explosion radioactive elements continue to have unforeseen consequences for mankind. It is for this reason that I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to this global catastrophe.

The mitigation of the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe has continued for over 13 years, and unfortunately we have to state that they will continue for more than a generation. At the earliest stages no one could have foreseen the scope of the catastrophe and all the aspects of its consequences — social, economic, international, humanitarian, environmental, technological and others.

The following figures eloquently illustrate the scope of the ecological consequences. More than 50 million curies of radioactive substances were released into the environment. The area contaminated as a result of the accident is 50,000 square kilometres in Ukraine alone, and the total surface of contaminated agricultural lands reached 3.5 million hectares. The real threat of long-term contamination of the Dnepr river, which is the main source of the water supply for more than 35 million Ukraine residents, still looms over the nation.

The disaster affected about 3.5 million inhabitants of Ukraine, who were subsequently taken under State social protection, including almost 82,000 people who have become invalids. I read the report that was made

available earlier. It contains a statistical error, for the number of invalids is much higher than the figure given. Their number increases daily — by 10 million a year — as a result of the deadly radiation. Children account for more than 1 million of the affected population.

The most difficult task involves the medical and biological consequences of the disaster because of its multifaceted impact, including, on the one hand, objectively measurable radiation doses and levels of environmental contamination and, on the other, socio-psychological factors, which are not a subject for quantitative analysis.

The real growth of sickness rates and the worsening of the psychophysical state of the population become more and more conspicuous year by year. Most disturbing is the fact that the number of cases of thyroid gland cancer among children has increased more than ten times as compared with the pre-disaster period. It is still not clear how the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster will affect the genetic and immunity status of the population.

The Parliament, the President and the Government of Ukraine are making all possible efforts to provide normal living conditions for the population in the radioactively contaminated regions and to improve health care and socio-psychological rehabilitation services. We have adopted appropriate legislative acts in the field of social security for the people who took a direct part in the nuclear accident mitigation and also for those affected by its consequences. About 7 per cent of State budget expenditure is allocated each year for these purposes, although the real requirements are higher. We must somehow acknowledge the fact that in reality 21 per cent of the budget is needed for this purpose but that so far we have been unable to meet that need.

One of the most difficult problems for Ukraine is related to the transformation of the shelter structure into an environmentally safe system. The shelter over the destroyed reactor was erected in less than half a year, thanks to the self-sacrificing efforts of builders, the professionalism of the specialists and the high technical capacities of the organizations taking part in its construction. Many of those who worked there are no longer alive. This highly sophisticated structure allowed us to reduce the fall-out of radioactive substances from the reactor to a minimum and to improve the radiation situation.

However, as experts have concluded, the short lifespan of the shelter has become a source of psychological stress for the population, as its hydro-technological characteristics present a threat for the whole region and for the water flow of the Dneper River. International cooperation has become very important to turn the shelter into an environmentally safe shell. For this purpose an international Chernobyl fund was established last year under the management of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which has available to it resources pooled from the countries of the Group of Seven, the European Commission, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Kuwait, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. From this rostrum, I would like to express our great gratitude to them.

Great help in mitigating the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe has come from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Unfortunately, we still have not solved the serious problem of fuel. There are about 180 tons of fuel and fuel-containing material concentrated in the shelter, a situation that presents a very serious potential threat. An equally difficult legacy are the more than 800 radioactive-waste "burial spots", as we call them. Their transformation from temporary facilities into a long-term system for radioactive waste storage is a technically and ecologically complex task that must be accomplished on an urgent basis.

We have to acknowledge that today we cannot give definite answers to some questions of vital importance. Is it possible, in principle, to mitigate the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster? How much time do we have to do this? How much will it cost? What will happen if we do nothing or postpone the solution of these problems to an indeterminate future?

We can assert that the scope and uniqueness of the catastrophe and its multiple aspects have become a real challenge for mankind. Realizing the need to draw on considerable material, financial and labour resources, we believe that the key factor should be the strengthening of international cooperation and attracting a number of highly skilled specialists and new technologies to resolve these problems.

The Chernobyl disaster created unique opportunities for comprehensive scientific research into nuclear and radiation disasters under real-life conditions. Joint international projects allow us to enrich the methodological arsenal and to significantly supplement the databases for further theoretical and practical research in the field of radiation impact on nature and living organisms.

Yesterday's meeting of the Quadripartite Committee on mitigating the effects of the Chernobyl catastrophe and today's consideration of this item in the General Assembly are no doubt important catalysts. We hope that through concerted efforts by international organizations and the Governments of individual countries the world community will undertake decisive steps towards eliminating the consequences of this major catastrophe in the history of humankind. We are counting on the authority of the United Nations in particular to solve the problems of Chernobyl, first and foremost because the United Nations does not allow — and we hope that it will not allow — relegating the problems of Chernobyl to the past, into a secondary category of "mankind's misfortunes of yesterday".

Unfortunately, we must point out that the problems of Chernobyl have recently come to be identified only with the closure of the nuclear power plant and the settling of the shelter issue. Many Governments and public organizations advocate the soonest possible closure of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, thereby relegating humanitarian aspects to the background. Taking into account the dimensions of the problem and its long-term nature, it is necessary to mobilize additional resources to continue Chernobyl projects. In this regard, we propose to hold a donors' meeting in the first half of the year 2000. We hope that this proposal will be supported.

We believe that in order for there to be better management of Chernobyl projects, it is necessary to establish the post of coordinator for Chernobyl questions in the United Nations office in Kiev, in the vicinity of the catastrophe's epicentre. We do not need any additional funding to do this.

I would like to emphasize that the General Assembly's resolution on this agenda item must ensure that Chernobyl continues to receive close attention from the international community. The United Nations has to remain the coordinator and catalyst for solving these problems. Indeed, the Chernobyl disaster showed that misfortune respects no national borders or political and social differences.

We call for international cooperation because the Chernobyl catastrophe has presented new and unusual tasks for the world community that are of exceptional complexity and as yet unknown scope. Only through integrated efforts and the help of highly qualified international specialists and new technologies representing breakthroughs in human knowledge can we solve these problems.

In conclusion, I would like to touch on yet another problem under this agenda item that is of concern to Ukraine. I am referring to the consequences of the Kosovo conflict on the vulnerable economies of southeastern Europe. As was quite correctly pointed out in the 1999 *Economic Survey of Europe*,

> "The economic impact of the Kosovo conflict ... is equivalent to a strong negative external shock which is aggravating further their economic situation." *(Vol. 2, p. 1)*

Of course, neighbouring States — including Ukraine — have also experienced serious economic losses. The interruption of navigation on the Danube River has paralysed the economic activity of most Ukrainian shipping companies, ports and businesses. Suffice it to say that the total losses incurred by Ukraine as a result of the war in Kosovo have exceed $300 million. Together with Romania, Bulgaria and other interested countries, we stand ready to participate in the efforts to clear the waterway in order to resume navigation on the Danube. In our view, this would greatly help to the alleviate humanitarian and economic hardships in the region.

In this regard, we cannot fail to agree with the Secretary-General, who stresses in his report on economic assistance to States affected by the implementation of Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in document A/54/534, that in the aftermath of the Kosovo crisis, economic assistance is urgently needed to address a variety of persisting economic and social problems of neighbouring and other affected States, both in support of the reconstruction and recovery efforts and on account of structural adjustment and economic transition in those countries.

I would like to thank all of you for your understanding our problems and for your readiness to settle them together with us.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to offer our condolences to the Government and people of the sisterly country of Turkey on the occasion of the devastating earthquake that struck that country earlier this week — the second such catastrophe to strike this friendly State in three months.

I should like from this forum to reiterate Kuwait's support for our brothers and sisters in Turkey in overcoming the consequences of those tragic events. It is perhaps timely that we are debating this item at a time when many States suffer annually from the devastating effects of natural disasters that are beyond the control of humankind.

I would recall here the devastation that hurricanes Georges and Mitch wrought in the States of the Caribbean region and the Latin American continent last year, as well as the floods and tidal waves that struck our sister State Bangladesh. These disasters require that the international community increase its material and moral support to their victims.

Kuwait fully recognizes the extremely limited resources and capabilities available to developing and small countries and their weak ecological and economic systems in meeting the challenges created by these natural disasters, which require concerted international efforts. In considering the dangers of these natural disasters, we must recognize that, regrettably, they are on the increase. In addition, thousands of people lose their lives as a result of man-made disasters such as wars and as a result of the use of deadly weapons. Although it is believed that these weapons can help bring about the settlement of long-standing disputes, their use ultimately aggravates the situation and results in widespread destruction due to narrow self-interests and destructive militarism.

We share the regret expressed by the Secretary-General, in his report on the work of the Organization, at the number of people killed in 1998 as a result of natural disasters and wars. The Secretary-General described that year as the worst in history, with natural disasters claiming the lives of more than 50,000.

In this context, my delegation would like to pay tribute to the efforts made by the Secretariat of the United Nations and the United Nations Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and to call attention to the need to raise awareness in this context in order to protect the safety and security of relief workers in the performance of their noble humanitarian functions. They deserve our support and encouragement.

Kuwait is aware of the suffering and frustration experienced by peoples and Governments as a result of losing two crucial components of development, namely the productive human factor, which is the key agent of development, and the material resources used by humankind as a means of achieving development goals and raising the standard of living to the desired levels. It is regrettable that losses are incurred in these two areas due to events that are beyond human control.

Kuwait also recognizes the burdens shouldered by developing and poor countries affected by these catastrophes in the areas of reconstruction and human rehabilitation, which are essential to development. This indeed is a very costly affair.

The Government and people of Kuwait have responded swiftly and spontaneously to these natural disasters, providing assistance by airlifting supplies to affected areas through a systematic and coordinated effort and under the supervision of the Government of Kuwait. This assistance is rendered in two phases: dispatching urgent in-kind and cash relief aid to the affected areas, and in the second stage providing grants and loans to those States to assist them in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process at all levels once the consequences of those disasters have been contained.

I wish to outline briefly some of the forms of aid offered by the State of Kuwait at both the governmental and public levels to friendly States in meeting the challenges posed by natural disasters. By way of example, let me note that the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development has offered Government grants and loans to friendly countries affected by natural disasters. From 1983 to August of this year, the Kuwait Fund has provided some $220 million to 12 affected countries in Asia, Africa and Europe, including loans to support rehabilitation programmes over the next five years.

In addition, Kuwaiti non-governmental organizations, including the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society, have, in 1998 and 1999, provided in-kind and cash assistance to countries ravaged by hurricanes, earthquakes and floods. An estimated $1.3 million was disbursed among the three continents that I mentioned.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm Kuwait's commitment, made in the course of the general debate,

to support development projects in many developing countries. This stems from our deep conviction that development and peace are organically linked and mutually supportive factors on which the prosperity and stability of human societies hinge.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am particularly pleased to express my thanks to the Secretary-General for the outstanding report he has submitted to us. The report clearly sets out all the numerous humanitarian activities undertaken by the United Nations and its specialized agencies in responding to the growing needs of people who are suffering from the consequences of natural disasters or domestic or inter-State wars, be they regional or international, as well as from intense economic and financial crises, which have increasingly affected a number of developing countries.

On this occasion, we would also express our condolences to and full solidarity with States that have recently experienced earthquakes, floods or other types of natural disasters. These disasters have taken the lives of thousands of victims and have seriously affected the social and economic infrastructures of those States.

We are particularly grateful to the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their efforts to contain many of these problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to the people who are affected. However, we note that these efforts do not meet all the basic needs of the people, partly because there has been an increase in such crises and their consequences, and partly because the assistance provided by donor countries has been dwindling considerably. That is why we call on the international community, in particular States that are most capable of doing so, to increase and consolidate their financial and humanitarian assistance to countries in difficulty so that they can deal with such crises and natural disasters.

We also call for increased international cooperation and the adoption of an appropriate, timely and long-term approach to coordinate assistance and the exchange of necessary information, in particular between United Nations specialized agencies and other international financial and development institutions in this field, so as to deal with crisis situations and phenomena.

We reaffirm our belief that humanitarian assistance must not replace measures aimed at containing or mitigating crises, conflicts and emerging occupation situations in the world. On the contrary, such measures should be carried out within the framework of peacekeeping operations and initiatives to ensure national reconciliation. That is why we call upon the parties involved in conflicts to respond favourably to such offers and initiatives of regional international mediation and good offices so as to resolve their disputes peacefully, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and the principles of international law, and on the basis of mutual respect for the human and civil rights of their peoples, regardless of their religious beliefs or ethnicity.

We believe that humanitarian assistance and relief should be properly channelled to those who are suffering and that international workers providing humanitarian assistance or relief should be protected. The international community must dissuade people from taking the lives of humanitarian workers or from taking them hostage. Such actions run counter to relevant international norms and human rights. We must strengthen the role of regional and international agencies in providing assistance to refugees and displaced persons for resolving their problems, justly and permanently, helping them to return home safely and compensating them for any damage done to them or to their property.

The Palestinian people are still facing a series of inhumane challenges and suffering as a result of Israeli occupation. Israel has extended its settlement policy, expropriated Palestinian land and plundered Palestinian natural and economic resources, to say nothing of the restrictions it has placed on the movement of the inhabitants of the occupied territories and its hindering of the activities and programmes of international agencies providing humanitarian assistance there. That is why we call on the international community to urge the Israeli Government to end its humanitarian, legal and moral violations and on States and financial and donor organizations to comply with their commitments to the Palestinian people so that they can set up their own developmental infrastructure and establish an independent State in Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Our deeply rooted traditions and culture form the basis of our society, which derives its strength from its belief in international and regional solidarity and our tolerant Islamic law. The President of our State, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan — may God protect him — has set up development and humanitarian institutions, as well as charities, such as the Zayed charity, the Red Crescent and the Abu Dhabi Development Fund to

complement local efforts in the private and public sectors to mobilize financial and moral resources to support developing countries and assist them in dealing with natural disasters and the effects of war or civil or regional conflict.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm the importance of respect for the sovereignty of States and for the protection of human rights and the maintenance of international peace and security to ensure sustainable development for all peoples. We call upon the United Nations and other regional and international organizations to strengthen their efforts to adopt necessary and effective mechanisms as soon as possible so they can increase their humanitarian and relief assistance and exchange information with the aim of mitigating the devastating effects of the disasters that have affected some countries. Such disasters may be ecological and natural, or they may result from economic developments or from the devastating effects of wars and conflicts, but they become more difficult to resolve as time goes by.

Mr. Farar (United States of America): We are here once again to bear witness to the seemingly endless plight of innocent victims in need of emergency humanitarian assistance. This year, as in years past, the international community has had to deal with the after-effects of natural disasters and wars throughout the world. From the cyclone in India to the fighting in Sierra Leone, the United Nations has been on hand, along with the Red Cross, donor Government aid agencies and non-governmental agencies, to provide food, water, blankets, shelter and other necessities of life to those who face devastating hardships.

The General Assembly is but one of the many actors on the world stage helping to ensure that emergency humanitarian assistance gets to those in need. Down the hall in this very building the Security Council is working on the root causes of the misery facing civilians, and especially children, touched by armed conflicts. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is working with many separate branches of the United Nations system to ensure that humanitarian needs are adequately met. My Government applauds OCHA and the other United Nations actors, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Health Organization, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Internally Displaced Persons, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and others, for the commendable work that they are doing. We encourage them to continue to coordinate their efforts under the able guidance of the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Over the past year, much of the world's attention has been focused on Kosovo, where we have seen the entire life cycle of a refugee population — from persecution to flight to repatriation — take place in a very compressed time-frame. Even as we were struggling to make peace in Kosovo sustainable, we were faced with a new crisis in East Timor. We are pleased to see that the humanitarian situations in Kosovo and in East Timor appear to be improving. The United Nations system deserves a great deal of credit for its work in alleviating those crises. We especially want to thank Sergio Vieira de Mello for his work in OCHA and in the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. New challenges lie ahead as he embarks on his role as the transitional administrator in East Timor.

Even though Kosovo and East Timor have grabbed the headlines, we remain keenly aware of the serious humanitarian problems that plague other parts of the world. We continue our support for humanitarian operations in Africa and elsewhere, and we encourage others to do the same. The United States, for its part, will allocate to Africa 50 per cent of its initial contribution to UNHCR for fiscal year 2000 in order to ensure that an equitable standard of care is provided to African refugees.

In this year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, we reaffirm the need for the international community to assist and protect populations affected by armed conflict, the need for all parties to ensure the safety of civilians, and the need to guarantee unimpeded and safe access by United Nations and other humanitarian personnel to those who require humanitarian assistance. Today we are particularly seized of the situation in Chechnya, and we call upon all parties to protect civilian populations and to allow safe access for humanitarian assistance. We also urge all countries to respond generously to the forthcoming United Nations appeals.

The question of security is particularly important to the United States. The international community must not stand by while refugees and displaced persons are exposed to cross-border attacks or forced recruitment, or are held hostage by armed elements within the camps, as has been happening in refugee camps in Guinea and in Liberia. In many places around the world, humanitarian

workers continue to be killed, kidnapped, injured or raped. The protection of these humanitarian workers is the primary responsibility of States. We call on States to investigate and to bring to justice those responsible for such attacks. The international community needs to move forward on a variety of options to help provide security for civilians and humanitarian personnel caught up in armed conflict, such as multinational civilian police and training for host country police.

I want to highlight the vulnerability of women and children during armed conflict. Physical and sexual abuse remains a widespread problem. It is the responsibility of all Governments to ensure the safety of women and children who have been forced to flee their homes and their lands, often without their husbands or fathers, and who depend on refugee-hosting countries and the international community for their safety.

We also remain concerned about the uneven and too often inadequate protection currently afforded to those who are internally displaced by armed conflict. We look forward to an opportunity to work with OCHA and the agencies members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to develop more predictable responses for ensuring that internally displaced persons receive the care and protection they need. We would like to commend the work done by Francis Mading Deng on establishing guiding principles on internal displacement. We advocate close cooperation among the relevant organizations of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, non-governmental organizations and States for ensuring the protection of internally displaced persons.

Over the past two years, the Security Council has addressed crucial humanitarian issues, including the protection of civilians in armed conflict, children and armed conflict, promoting peace and security, and protection for humanitarian assistance to refugees and others in conflict situations. The United States welcomes the involvement of the Security Council in these issues, recognizing that humanitarian crises often involve situations that may pose a threat to international peace and security.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the energy and hard work that OCHA has brought to its core tasks of policy development, advocacy and coordination of humanitarian responses.

We look forward to the launch next week in Geneva of the consolidated appeals for 2000, and we note with pleasure the participation of the Secretary-General to underscore the importance of the humanitarian efforts of the United Nations. The consolidated appeals process should be used by the United Nations as a strategic planning tool as well as an appeal for humanitarian assistance. OCHA's field coordination role has enabled United Nations agencies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to work together more effectively. OCHA is also providing important information services through ReliefWeb and the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN). We support the Secretary-General's proposals for extending the use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund.

In closing, we believe that OCHA has more than adequately demonstrated its value, and we continue to believe that its funding should be among the priorities in the regular budget.

Mr. Moura (Brazil): Both natural and man-made disasters continue to cause pain and suffering, while the resources available to alleviate their consequences fall short of what is needed. There is a widespread belief that nothing can be done about natural disasters, and that natural catastrophes such as earthquakes, floods and hurricanes demand an *ex post facto* reaction. Although emergency relief for natural disasters is essential, preparedness is also crucial. If we cannot tame nature or stop natural disasters from happening, there is still the possibility of prevention.

As stated by the Secretary-General in his report on the work of the Organization (A/54/1), a number of Governments lack the funds for major risk-reduction and disaster-prevention programmes. International assistance is key in this regard and certainly makes a difference in mitigating damage and in reducing the need for humanitarian aid and reconstruction.

If prevention plays an important part with respect to natural disasters, it has an even greater role when it comes to so-called complex emergencies. "Complex emergency" is the euphemism used to appease our conscience in the face of situations in which human beings have their dignity abased on a large scale as a result of poverty and conflict.

Prevention has a broad meaning and does not lend itself to a short-sighted security approach. It has to do with the construction of solid pillars for society through cooperation for development, poverty eradication and the strengthening of the rule of law.

In our view, strategies to tackle humanitarian problems should focus on conflict prevention, peacemaking and post-conflict peace-building. The success of our endeavour depends on adopting an integrated approach to humanitarian action, one that takes into account the multiple dimensions of conflicts. Humanitarian problems cannot be adequately addressed unless the underlying causes of conflicts and complex emergencies are settled.

I wish to commend the work undertaken by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) under the leadership of Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Let me highlight two aspects of United Nations humanitarian assistance that we deem essential to the effort to uphold human dignity. The first relates to coordination. The many different humanitarian agencies must work together in a coordinated effort to provide aid.

We commend the efforts of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to strengthen coordination mechanisms. The admission of the World Bank into the Inter-Agency Standing Committee last March is a most welcome development. It is fundamental to build on experiences such as the joint disaster response and recovery mission, OCHA, undertaken in all countries affected by hurricane Mitch, by OCHA, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization.

The coordination efforts must be based on the principle of shared responsibility and joint efforts to tackle humanitarian problems. The mandates can differ in nature. But the work of all humanitarian and development agencies, along with that of the United Nations main organs, is intertwined, since the overriding goal — the full enjoyment of basic human rights — is indivisible. We therefore attach great importance to the contribution that can be made by the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council in their respective spheres of competence with a view to producing a synergy in the field of humanitarian assistance.

The second aspect I would like to point out is that the concept of humanitarian assistance goes far beyond the phase of emergency aid. However, there is an ever-widening gap between the delivery of immediate relief assistance and longer-term development cooperation. People are easily touched by humanitarian disasters but frequently seem less willing to create an environment conducive to development. Post-conflict recovery and capacity-building are essential to address the consequences of many conflicts, including situations in which people remain displaced or return under precarious conditions. Development is crucial not only to address the consequences of conflicts but also to prevent wars from breaking out in the first place.

We welcome discussions under way — for instance among the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Bank, UNDP and other actors — on how to set up coordinating and funding mechanisms to facilitate the transition from emergency relief to development assistance.

My closing words are to praise the champions of this cause, the women and men risking their lives in trying situations around the world to provide hope for the hopeless. We are aware that the difficulty of providing aid to those in need is mounting, due to a vast array of factors.

One obstacle in the way of assistance stems from the very nature of most of today's conflicts. In internal conflicts, the difference between combatants and civilians is often blurred, with well-known, tragic consequences. In this context, assistance is considered an important asset, and in many instances, unfortunately, it is diverted by belligerents to meet their strategic designs. Needless to say, the humanitarian workers bear the brunt of this sort of action. Recent episodes in which the abnegation of humanitarian workers cost them their lives constitute examples that should not be forgotten.

It is urgent that all efforts be made, as a matter of the highest priority, to enhance the security and safety of humanitarian and United Nations personnel. It is equally urgent to assure the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian assistance, so as to enhance credibility and trust in conflict-ridden areas.

Mr. Jilani (Palestine, *spoke in Arabic*): At the outset and on behalf of my delegation, I would like to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his report in document A/54/134.

My thanks also go to Mr. Chinmaya Gharekhan, who worked as the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories over the last three years, until 30 September 1999. Due to his high level of efficiency and his long and vast professional experience, he was able to fulfil the task entrusted to him and to his Office in the best manner, against all odds and under the most difficult, complex circumstances that prevailed in the

region over those three years, despite the various obstacles and difficulties stemming from the policy of closure and siege. On behalf of the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian people, we express our gratitude and appreciation to him as a loyal friend of the Palestinian people and wish him every success and happiness.

We would also like to welcome the decision of the Secretary-General to approve Mr. Terje Larsen as the new United Nations Coordinator for the peace process in the Middle East and as a Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. Mr. Larsen was in fact the first to fill this post, from 1994 until 1996. He is indeed a good and known friend who contributed significantly to creating the momentum for the peace process in the Middle East, particularly on the Palestinian track. We congratulate him most sincerely and wish him every success in his new mission and assure him of our readiness to cooperate with him for the success of his task.

At their meeting in Washington on 30 November of last year the donor countries pledged to provide assistance to the Palestinian people in the amount of 3 billion dollars over a five-year period. This pledge was reiterated during the recent meeting in Tokyo, held under the chairmanship of the Foreign Ministers of Japan and Norway in mid-October. Regrettably, these pledges have not been honoured and translated into action. Moreover, there has been a drastic 50 per cent decline this year in the annual contributions offered to the Palestinian people.

Once again we emphasize the importance of honouring the pledges undertaken by the donor countries, as well as the importance we attach to the contribution of the donor countries to the peace process and their assistance to the Palestinians to build and reconstruct their national institutions. Achieving economic and social development will help Palestinians eliminate their suffering and the consequences of the abominable occupation so they can contribute effectively, like all other free peoples, to the development and prosperity of the region. In this context, I should state that the Palestinian people greatly appreciate the efforts of the international community in this respect and would like to reiterate our gratitude to the donor countries for their continuous support.

The report reflects that for the first time since the beginning of the peace process there has been a slight improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinian people. This includes an increase in the gross domestic and national products as well as in the level of private investment. Moreover, the report points out that the economic improvement in 1998 was due to a reduction in the number of comprehensive closures in the occupied Palestinian territories. This fact underscores once again that Israel should refrain from implementing its policy of closures and state of siege, which has devastating effects on the Palestinian economy. We call upon Israel to put an end to its policy of using closures as a way of imposing collective punishment under all circumstances and conditions. We also call upon Israel to halt immediately its illegal practices, particularly the expansion and construction of settlements, as well as the confiscation of land and the demolition of houses.

The confiscation of land, the building of settlements and Israel's negative attitude towards the Palestinians will not increase the confidence of the peoples of the region in the peace process and in the chance of its success, nor increase the confidence of private investors. Credibility can be developed through the faithful honouring of the spirit and the letter of all agreements, without any delay, and by recognizing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their rights to return to their homes, to self-determination and to building an independent State. Recognition of these rights, as required by international legitimacy, is a prerequisite for a comprehensive, lasting and just peace in the Middle East.

We emphasize the important role that the United Nations plays in the achievement of this just, lasting and comprehensive peace, given its responsibility towards the Palestinians. Moreover, we would like to reaffirm the importance of the United Nations role in providing assistance to the Palestinian people, as well as the important role of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and of the Special Coordinator's Office in Gaza. This office should be strengthened and supported.

Mr. Darwish (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, on behalf of the people and the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt, I would like to express our profound condolences to our sister State Turkey on the recent earthquake that struck that country a few days ago. Our sympathies also go out to those countries that lost some of their citizens in the crash of the plane chartered by the World Food Programme, which was carrying relief personnel and supplies to Kosovo. I would also like

to thank the Secretary-General for his reports on the items under discussion.

The provision of humanitarian assistance in response to natural and man-made disasters is an indispensable and noble activity. The international community must support such assistance and work to maximize its effectiveness, as it must also continue to support the United Nations efforts to deal with natural disasters, as well as with the consequences of intra- and inter-State wars. Indeed the Secretary-General was right in stressing in his "Report on the work of the Organization", issued last September, that natural disasters should be at the top of the international agenda given the immense humanitarian and material losses they cause.

Although the number of inter-State wars has been declining remarkably, we note with regret a disturbing increase in new armed conflicts that are claiming growing numbers of human lives, destroying both physical infrastructure and human resources, and impeding development efforts in the States concerned. These conflicts have also resulted in the displacement of unprecedented numbers of people.

Egypt calls on all parties to armed conflicts to protect the rights of civilians and to ensure the safety and security of relief and humanitarian assistance workers. The Egyptian delegation also emphasizes that assaults on relief personnel should be treated as grave and inadmissible actions. At the same time, Egypt calls on relief workers to respect the laws and systems prevailing in the host countries. In deference to the principle of national sovereignty and in order to avoid the dangers that such personnel might be exposed to, the right of access to civilians in need of assistance — women, children and men — should be exercised by securing the approval of the States of which these needy people are citizens. Despite the difficulties that poor countries face in dealing with such issues, such as the lack of a strong central government, we call on the General Assembly to define the steps to be followed by the United Nations so it can deal with these difficult situations in a transparent manner and with the full participation of all States, large and small.

Egypt underscores the importance of the United Nations assuming a leading role in monitoring and assessing relief and humanitarian assistance efforts. Egypt calls on the United Nations and its organs and specialized agencies to provide assistance to States that need to build their institutional capabilities at the national level, and it calls on these bodies to accord adequate attention to the achievement of optimal coordination among all actors in this sphere, be they part of the United Nations system or of other relevant organizations. This should be done by implementing an integrated approach to dealing with natural disasters at all stages, from early warning to relief assistance, recovery, reconstruction and development.

The delegation of Egypt feels that the provision of adequate resources for this important activity would help the relevant organs fully meet their humanitarian obligations. In this regard, we underscore that these additional resources should not be taken from appropriations for development programmes and activities designed to benefit developing countries. Here we note with growing concern what the Secretary-General has mentioned in his report entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations": that the rate of response to consolidated appeals for the first five months of 1999 was approximately 30 per cent, that the geographical and sectoral distribution of the response was extremely uneven, and that this uneven funding means that contributions do not ensure a necessary minimum of care. Therefore, Egypt calls on the financially capable States and the international financial institutions to increase their contributions for humanitarian and relief assistance, in implementation of the principle of international solidarity and interdependence and in fulfilment of the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

In this regard, the Egyptian delegation supports the Secretary-General's proposal, made in the context of his proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, to increase the resources provided for responding to natural disasters. This proposal seems particularly worthy since it would be the first such increase in more than 15 years. Also in this regard, in order to examine the Secretary-General's proposals on the modalities of developing the mechanisms of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, we look forward to receiving the report of his review of this matter.

I wish to express our gratitude for the joint efforts undertaken by neighbouring Turkey and Greece to establish a joint unit to cope with natural disasters. Those two neighbours suffered devastating earthquakes in August and September. The challenge of dealing with their ordeal has unleashed their creative ingenuity. Egypt has become a co-sponsor of the draft resolution submitted by Turkey and Greece today.

I also wish to convey our appreciation to the friendly State of Argentina for co-sponsoring the draft resolution on the participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations. We welcome this important draft resolution, co-sponsored by Argentina and Egypt, among others, in recognition of the constructive role played by volunteers from all countries in relief activities. We also acknowledge the programmes and assistance provided by the United Nations Development Programme to the Palestinian Authority, *inter alia*, to help build its institutional capacities to fight disease and to meet the requirements of people with special needs. In Rwanda and the Balkans, it has helped to resettle refugees by providing low-cost housing and humanitarian assistance.

In closing, I wish, on behalf of Egypt, to express our sincere appreciation to all United Nations agencies operating in the Palestinian territories. These agencies are indeed contributing effectively to improving services in the development of the institutional capacities of the Palestinian Authority. Our thanks go to the European Union member States for sponsoring the draft resolution on this sub-item. On this occasion, Egypt calls on all donor countries to fulfil their pledges of assistance to the Palestinian people as it strives, at this critical stage, to build its independent State. Such assistance will certainly contribute to the evolution of the peace process to its ultimate conclusion: the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, hopefully in the not-too-distant future.

Mr. Preware (Nigeria): The Nigerian delegation commends the Secretary-General for his comprehensive and excellent reports on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations. The reports bring out clearly both the increasing urgency and complexity in the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance and the scope of activities required to sustain continued international commitment.

The 1990s, unfortunately, saw an extraordinary rise in the number, scope and scale of natural disasters. In the last 23 months, in particular, we have witnessed the worst string of natural disasters. Forest fires, drought, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and so on have devastated many parts of the world. Developing countries have been particularly hard hit. The problems attendant on these tragic events have often been complicated by destabilizing wars.

One result of these conflicts has been the significant increase in the number of internally displaced persons and refugees in several countries. An estimated 500,000 people were displaced between January and May in Angola alone. The Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict has seen some 750,000 persons internally displaced. Today, some 237,000 refugees from Sierra Leone are in Guinea and Liberia, while over 140,000 remain internally displaced. International relief efforts have been seriously hampered by a combination of factors, including the lack of a rapid-response mechanism, ongoing conflicts and serious resource constraints.

While Nigeria welcomes the 30 per cent rise in the 1999 pledges for Africa, it notes with concern the increasing shortfall between actual needs and funds raised. The Secretary-General's report shows that, as of May this year, Africa's requirements for affected areas and States stood at $697.32 million, while available funds stood at only $193.74 million, representing a mere 26 per cent of actual need.

The difficulties of inadequate resources are further complicated by the uneven geographical and sectoral distribution of funds. The level of relief assistance extended to Kosovo in the Balkans, where some 1.2 million displaced persons were resettled in 2 months, contrasts very sharply with the situation in Angola, where some 1.6 million displaced remain largely ignored.

The international community must not feign unawareness of this sad contrast. It behooves the international humanitarian community to respond in a more balanced manner to the humanitarian needs of societies afflicted by these unfortunate elements of human misery. Natural disasters, wars, human displacement and refugee situations, wherever they occur, deserve fair humanitarian response. Nations and donor States, in responding to these situations, necessarily operate a range of mechanisms for financing post-conflict humanitarian efforts. Unfortunately, these mechanisms themselves very often create constraints, delays and difficulties. My delegation invites the international humanitarian community, especially donor countries, to seek ways and means of making humanitarian interventions more timely and fairly.

Nigeria welcomes the reform of United Nations activities relating to humanitarian assistance, which has led to the transformation of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs into the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. We note the sense of purpose and focus given by the Office to the triple functions of policy development and coordination, advocacy of

humanitarian issues and coordination of humanitarian response. The streamlining of the various offices of the United Nations agencies, with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as the focal point, has quickened the decision-making process on humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

Nigeria is hopeful that the establishment of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as the principal forum for inter-agency coordination will enhance a coherent and clear division of responsibilities and accountability in the field, as stipulated in the Council conclusions of 1998. It is crucial that the Committee continue to develop a field-based system to strengthen the monitoring process in respect of programme targets and strategic objectives.

In responding to natural disasters, increased emphasis should be placed on how to strengthen disaster preparedness and early warning systems at the local, country and regional levels. Efforts should be made to identify regionally based experts to assist in improving the operational preparedness of Governments to meet emergency and disaster situations.

The commitment of Nigeria to the problem of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance has resulted in our adoption of national plans for disaster reduction and the establishment of the National Emergency Management Authority under the overall coordination of our newly created Ministry of Environment.

In conclusion, Nigeria strongly urges that special efforts be made to enhance the local capacity in disaster response and to utilize already existing capacities in developing countries which are closer to the site of disaster. What is therefore required is a well-coordinated partnership between the developed countries, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other members of the international community in this very important challenge. It is a challenge that strikes at the very foundation of the societies affected by these disasters. The international community must seek not only to sustain, but more importantly to strengthen, its response capacity to disaster and need.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.